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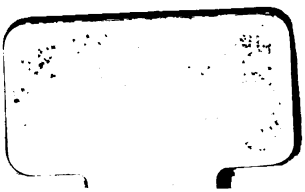

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CHARACTER AND WORK:

Hints for Younger Men and Women.

BY

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PREFACE.

Some time ago I had occasion to speak to a body of men on the work which they had to do, and the duty of doing it with their might. As I meditated further on the subject, I saw that it could not be treated satisfactorily without considering the subjects of character, knowledge, and opinion. These reflections led to my drawing out the plan of a series of addresses, the substance of which is reproduced in these pages.

I may mention that they have been delivered, in the form of lectures or conferences, in my own Church of S. Mary Magdalene, Taunton; in the Cathedral of Worcester during the Mission held there in the early part of 1876; and in S. John's Church, Edinburgh, in the spring of last year.

W. R. C.

Epiphany, 1878.

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I.

ON THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE.

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CHARACTER AND WORK.

I.

ON THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE.

THE great French preacher Adolphe Monod was, for nearly a year before his death, unable to take any part in public work. For a part of that time a small number of his former hearers were accustomed to gather around his bed and listen to addresses, which were afterwards published as "The Adieux of Adolphe Monod to his Friends and the Church." Some of the most remarkable among the addresses are those entitled "The Regrets of a Dying Man." There are probably very many men who have more reason than he had to look back with regret upon their past life; but there are few men who can draw near

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to the hour when they must bid adieu to the world and their fellow-men, without some serious thoughts of the past and the future.

A writer far more widely known than Monod, Dr. David Frederick Strauss, tells us, in the preface to a book written shortly before his death, that he has come to that time of life when every thoughtful man must hear a voice within him saying, "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." Dr. Strauss was an atheist; yet he could not divest himself of the sense of responsibility.

There are many men who come to the end of their life full of regrets, and with a sense of being able to give only a poor account of their stewardship; and of these a considerable proportion are able to say that they would have done better if they had only known what to do. If they had, in their early days, received wise and kindly guidance for the ordering of their life, they would have escaped many dangers into which they had fallen, they would have avoided many errors which they had committed.

In the following pages I wish to offer, especially to young men and women, some such counsels as we all have need of at all times of our life; but which are of peculiar value in its earlier stages. I offer them with all humility, and yet with some confidence; for they are not my own. I have gathered them from the best

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and wisest of men, inspired and uninspired. I do not fear, therefore, to submit them to the judgement of men of experience; and I commend them, with an earnest prayer for God's blessing upon them, to those whose experience of life is, for the most part, yet to come.

I begin with a statement which only the most thoughtless will gainsay. *Every man has his work to do in the world.* Every man must do it or neglect it; and, if he does it, must do it well or ill. But no one can do his work efficiently unless he is taught to do it. He must be educated and trained for it. In order to do our work, we must be workmen. This involves the formation of character, principles, opinions. It is, therefore, of these subjects that I now propose to speak: to the young principally, and yet also to those who are no longer altogether young, but who have not lost the hope of correcting their errors, and of doing their work better in the future.

I. We naturally begin with the subject of knowledge. In the creation, the first day's work was the production of light. So knowledge must precede all right thinking and acting in human life. Surely it cannot be necessary to say a single word on the importance of knowledge. If you heard a blind man descanting on the superiority of darkness over light, on the uselessness of the sense of sight, and the advantages

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of being blind, you could only pity or smile. But this would be no more ridiculous than to assert the excellence of ignorance and the uselessness or hurtfulness of knowledge.

But there are many persons who are by no means prepared to go to these extremes, who yet do not see clearly that ignorance is an evil, and knowledge a good; who, even when they accept these general principles as undeniable, yet regard knowledge with a kind of suspicion, as though it concealed under its fair exterior something that might prove hurtful to the best interests of men.

The objections to knowledge have been so often considered that a very brief notice of them will be sufficient for our present purpose. Sometimes Scripture has been pressed into the service of the adversaries of knowledge; but they have generally quoted only one set of texts and ignored those of an opposite tendency. For instance, they have reminded us of the statement of S. Paul, that "knowledge puffeth up," * which is true enough of certain kinds of knowledge, when held apart from love and goodness; and they have declared, with the wisest of men, that "in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." † But they have not quoted from the next chapter of the same book, in which he says: "Wisdom excelleth folly, as far as

* 1 Cor. viii. 1. † Eccl. i. 18.

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light excelleth darkness" ;* nor have they referred to the numberless passages in which ignorance is condemned, and knowledge, wisdom, and understanding are commended: "Get wisdom, get understanding," says the wise man; and again, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding."†

It is sometimes said that the increase of knowledge, especially of the knowledge of nature, tends to irreligion, or even to atheism; and this notion, which has been entertained by some religious men, has been so far improved upon by the enemies of religion that they have ventured to affirm that "ignorance is the parent of devotion."

If this were truly so, then indeed the worst things that have been said of religion would be true. We need only say in reply, however, that the Holy Scriptures give no countenance to such a notion; and all experience is opposed to it. No! Ignorance is the parent of superstition; but superstition is only a counterfeit, or at the best a corruption of true devotion. God's service is a reasonable service. He is light and truth, and in proportion as light and truth enter into the minds of men, will they know Him, resemble Him, love Him, and serve Him.

And if it be said that knowledge of any kind has a tendency to produce irreligion, we will answer with Lord

* Eccl. ii. 13. † Prov. iv. 5, 7.

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Bacon:* "It is an assumed truth, and a conclusion of experience, that a little or superficial knowledge of philosophy may incline the mind of man to atheism, but a further proceeding therein doth bring the mind back again to religion;" and he truly says, in another place,† that so far is the "increase of natural knowledge" from being hurtful to religion, that "it leadeth to the greater exaltation of the glory of God," by making us better acquainted with His "great and wonderful works."

There is one argument against the attainment of knowledge which deserves a moment's consideration. It is sometimes said that it is of no use striving to learn and increase one's knowledge, since he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow; in other words, the more a man learns the more he becomes aware of his own ignorance, the less he is contented with his actual attainments. If we state this objection in another form, it will furnish its own confutation. The objection really means that the more ignorant a man is, the more self-satisfied he is; which, in a general way, is perfectly true. But is not this truth the strongest condemnation of those who are wilfully ignorant? If it be true that knowledge under certain conditions puffeth up, is it not still more true that ignorance puffeth

* He is, of course, speaking only of natural philosophy. *Advancement of Learning. Works* (Ellis & Spedding), iii. 267.

† *Of the Interpretation of Nature. Works*, iii. 221.

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up? Is it not the greatest possible obstacle to that lowly opinion of ourselves and our own attainments which is the way to all true knowledge and goodness?

The strongest inducement to the pursuit of knowledge is also the most obvious; that ignorance is weakness, while knowledge is power. As Bacon remarks,* knowledge is a part of God's power. So also knowledge is a part of the power possessed by every human being, while ignorance is one of the largest elements in our weakness.

To put the matter in its plainest form, who has not experienced many times in his life the disadvantages of ignorance and the benefit of knowledge? In our ignorance we are as men groping our way in the dark. When we know our work every step is definite and certain; we are like strong men marching in a well-known path, in the clear light of day. And besides, almost every one knows that the real value of all work depends not only upon the motive with which it is undertaken—doubtless a very important consideration—but also upon the amount of intelligence with which it is carried out. One hour of thoughtful, intelligent work is often of more real worth than the heedless, inconsiderate work which is spread over many hours.

Or look at the question in another way. To whom do you have recourse when you need guidance in any of the difficulties of life? To the man who, in your

* *Med. Sac. Works*, vii. 253.

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judgement at least, understands his work; to the man whom you believe to possess a knowledge of the subject on which you require information or assistance.

If you have a religious difficulty you will refer it to one who has some knowledge of theology, to one who has made the nature of man and the revelation of God the subject of his most earnest and serious study. So with other needs. You will not intentionally put yourself into the hands of one who knows nothing of the constitution of the human body if you wish to be restored to health; nor will you, knowingly, submit yourself, in matters of law, to the guidance of one who has no knowledge of the laws of the land. These considerations are very simple and obvious; yet they are not unfrequently forgotten, and, in practice, they are often denied.

II. We must now, however, look a little more closely at the subject before us, and ask, *What do we mean by knowledge?* We do not attempt to deal with the subject in a speculative manner. We do not care to argue with those who say that knowledge is a thing unattainable, impossible. It is sufficient for our present purpose that men are capable of acquiring what they call knowledge, and that they act upon their knowledge with a sense of certainty. Let philosophers theorize as they please; we take our ground in the common consciousness and common sense of mankind. The subject can be discussed

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apart from all philosophical theories as to the nature of human knowledge.

Now, what do we mean when we employ this word *knowledge ?*

By knowledge we mean *certain perception.* This is Johnson's definition. "Certain perception; indubitable apprehension," he defines it; and he quotes the words of Locke, the English philosopher: "Knowledge, which is the highest degree of the speculative faculties, consists in the perception of the truth of affirmative or negative propositions." To the same effect Sir W. Hamilton observes: "Knowledge is the mere possession of truths."* It will help us to grasp these definitions if we compare knowledge with those two operations of the mind which are the most nearly allied to knowledge—I mean *belief* and *opinion.* By *belief* we mean that which we hold without any doubt on the credible testimony of others, not as the result of our own examination. By *opinion* we mean the judgement which we form on any subject of which we cannot be absolutely certain. It may amount to a practical certainty, but, if it be opinion, it goes no further. By *knowledge* we mean certain perception; the mind in this case so grasps the object presented to it—we so clearly perceive the truth, by our senses if the object be a material one, by our intelligence if it be a principle, that there remains no doubt on the subject.

* *Lect. on Metaph.*, i. 8.

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Now, knowledge may be of various kinds. There is first the knowledge of simple facts, the most elementary kind of knowledge. Then there is the knowledge of the relation of these facts, the principles which underlie them and connect them. There can be no doubt as to which of these kinds of knowledge is the greater. Yet the more humble is not to be despised, for it is indispensable. It is true, on the one hand, that a mere accumulation of facts is of little value, is very nearly worthless. It is as useless as heaps of brick and mortar would be to a man who wanted a house, but had no knowledge of the art of building. Yet the bricks and mortar must be obtained, otherwise no amount of knowledge and skill will provide the house. So we must collect the facts which go to the building up of the structure of knowledge; although the facts will be barren and dead where there is no knowledge of principles to bind them together and make them an organized whole. A wise counsellor who wishes to lead another in the path of true knowledge will never omit to set these principles clearly before him.*

Closely connected with knowledge is the cultivation of mind which results from it.

Let me remind you of the distinction between knowledge and cultivation. "By *knowledge* is understood," I am quoting Sir W. Hamilton again,† "the

* "True knowledge," says Bacon, "is knowledge by causes." *Nov. Org. Aph.*, ii. 2. *Works*, iv. 119.

† *Metaph.*, vol. i. p. 8.

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mere possession of truths; by intellectual cultivation, or intellectual development, the power, acquired through exercise of the higher faculties, of a more varied, vigorous, and protracted activity." This intellectual cultivation is, in fact, the most valuable result of the laborious search after truth—more valuable than the facts collected, or even the principles involved in those facts. A man may lose much of what he has acquired; he may forget, he does continually forget, a large part of all that he has learnt; he never loses, until his vital powers begin to decay, and not altogether then, the power of thinking accurately, vigorously, continuously, which he has gained by the mental gymnastic in which he has been trained.*

III. We now proceed to consider the *method* in which knowledge is to be acquired. In doing so, I must, of course, have chiefly in view those who are comparatively young. But the truth on this subject is necessary for all of us. Men must never cease to accumulate knowledge and to gain experience. Wise men will to their life's end submit themselves to that discipline which is needful alike for this world and for that which is to come. And I must add, that no man is too old to unlearn something of his bad ways of working; no man is incapable of being taught how he may think better, act better, live better.

When we speak of the beginning of the acquisition

* *Cf.* Hamilton, i. 12.

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of knowledge, we are using relative terms. This work is begun before we are conscious of it. At first we are little more than passive; and even when we become active, our activity is so guided by others that it can hardly be said, for a long time, to be chosen by ourselves, or to be animated by any definite principles of which we are conscious.

There comes a time, however, when we have to consider what we are doing in this matter, and on what principles we are conducting our work, of whatever kind it may be. Happy are they who have not, at such a time, to undo a great portion of all that has been done for them by others; happy if they have not to change, I say not their opinions, for this is in a measure inevitable, but the very principles of their thinking, the very methods in which they have been labouring towards the light of truth and the certainty of knowledge. Be this as it may, it is for us to seek out the true principles of this pursuit, and to accept and embrace them with all the strength of our deepest convictions, and with all the energies of a resolute will.

They no longer need to be sought for as though they were doubtful or undiscovered. To apply them, to work them out in our own life, can never be easy for any of us, until perfect self-abnegation is easy. To describe them is not difficult; it is only to accept the conclusions of the greatest teachers of mankind,

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whether those who have been the expounders of human wisdom, or those who have been made the channels for the communication of Divine truth.

The ordinary and most common causes of human stupidity, in the true sense of that word, are conceit and sloth.* Either of these vices is almost sufficient to produce moral and intellectual ruin; but the two combined are utter destruction to everything that is best in human character. We have, therefore, no hesitation in placing among the foremost requirements in order to the acquisition of knowledge, a humble mind and a willingness to labour.

Humility is the foundation of all knowledge, both human and divine. Except we become as little children we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. God hides the truths of His kingdom from the wise and prudent, and reveals them unto babes. And it is the very same with human knowledge. "It is a point fit and necessary," says Lord Bacon, in his work on the *Interpretation of Nature*,† "in the front and beginning of this work, without hesitation or reserve to be professed, that it is no less true in this human kingdom of knowledge than in God's kingdom of heaven, that no man shall enter it *except he become first as a little child.*"

It is, indeed, hardly necessary to say that the feeling of humility, the sense of ignorance, the convic-

* *Cf.* Pascal (Ed. of Havet), xxxvi. † *Works*, iii. 224.

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tion of the boundlessness of the vast ocean of truth which is still to be explored, is not only the first thought of the true seeker after knowledge, but the last. It is a thought, a conviction, an overpowering impression, which deepens and enlarges as he advances in his course. The story of Sir Isaac Newton is well known. He seemed to himself as the child on the sea-shore, finding perhaps pebbles more beautiful than those previously discovered; but with the great ocean of truth lying all undiscovered before him.

"The sciences," says Pascal,* one of the greatest thinkers of the world, "have two extremities which touch each other; the first is that pure natural ignorance in which all men are born. The other extremity is that which is reached by those great souls which have traversed the whole extent of human knowledge, and return to the same sense of ignorance from which they set out. But this is that learned ignorance which knows itself."

It is the converse of the statement of S. Paul: "If any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know."† Humility is, however, but the first and only a kind of preliminary requirement for the pursuit of knowledge. In order to carry on the work effectually and successfully there is need of *attention, discrimination, laborious devotion.*

* Art. iii. 18 (Ed. of Havet). † 1 Cor. viii. 2.

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Attention is the great helm which governs the mind of man. It is the explanation of nearly all the differences by which men are distinguished. According to a man's attention—put it in other words, according as a man gives his mind to a thing—so is the man: religious or irreligious, worldly or spiritual, sensual or intellectual.

The subject of Attention is of so great importance in its bearing upon our whole inquiry, that we must dwell upon it a little longer. "Attention," says Sir W. Hamilton,* "is to consciousness what the contraction of the pupil is to sight . . . . The greater capacity of continuous thinking that a man possesses, the longer and more steadily can he follow out the same train of thought—the stronger is his power of attention; and in proportion to his power of attention will be the success with which his labour is rewarded. All commencement is difficult, and this is more especially true of intellectual effort . . . . But if we are vigorous enough to pursue our course in spite of obstacles, every step, as we advance, will be found easier; the mind becomes more animated and energetic; the distractions gradually diminish; the attention is more exclusively concentrated upon its object; the kindred ideas flow with greater freedom and abundance . . . . The difference between an ordinary mind

* *Metaph.*, Lect. xiv. (vol. i. p. 248). The whole lecture deserves careful study.

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and the mind of a Newton consists principally in this, that the one is capable of the application of a more continuous attention than the other . . . . This is, in fact, what Sir Isaac, with equal modesty and shrewdness, himself admitted. To one who complimented him on his genius, he replied that, if he had made any discoveries, it was owing more to patient attention than to any other talent." Mr. Carlyle says that Genius is "a transcendent capacity for taking trouble"; and the remark is only a repetition of Newton's judgement. Let me entreat my readers to pause very earnestly on this thought. Absolutely nothing can be done in the way of acquiring knowledge without attention. And this power, although not easily acquired, can be acquired—by labour. In one sense, this is the whole question. Let a man give his mind to what he studies, fixedly, steadily, continuously, and he will master it. But we must go a little further into details.

A second requirement is *discrimination*. In order to knowledge, there must be continual doubt—at any rate, continual hesitation, and the suspension of assent. This is, after all, only an application of the principle of humility. It is a subject which has engaged the efforts of all the greatest teachers of mankind.

The whole object of Socrates seemed to be to show men how confused was their thinking—to guard

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them against fancying that they knew things simply because they could use words about them.

Pascal spoke so strongly on the same subject that he has even been accused of favouring scepticism, and leading men to endless doubting.

Lord Bacon devotes a large portion of his book on the *Advancement of Learning* and his *Novum Organum* to cautions against false, confused, imperfect apprehensions in knowledge. It is beyond my purpose to discuss the subject minutely; but it would be impossible to offer the slightest guidance on the subject we are considering, without mentioning some of the dangers which lie in the way of all who are seeking after knowledge.

1. One of the notions against which Lord Bacon utters the most earnest warning is the opinion that, because we have learnt to use *words*, therefore we have acquired knowledge. He calls it "the first distemper of learning, when men study words and not matter."* And this is an evil which certainly is not diminished in our own days. There could hardly be a greater self-deception than to imagine that our understanding of a subject is in proportion to our power of speaking about it.

2. Another caution which he gives is against precipitancy. "Another error," he says, "is an impatience of doubt, and haste to assertion without

* *Adv. of Learning. Works*, iii. 284.

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due and mature suspension of judgement."* It is what we call "jumping to a conclusion," and it may be sufficient only to notice it.

3. Again, he cautions us against the affecting of two extremes, or, as he expresses it, the "extreme affecting of two extremities, the one Antiquity, the other Novelty."† "Surely," he says, "the advice of the prophet is the true direction in this matter, 'Stand ye in the old ways, and see which is the good way, and walk therein' (Jer. vi. 16)." And he gives a true and admirable explanation of those words: "Antiquity deserveth that reverence, that men should make a stand thereupon and discover what is the best way; but when the discovery is well taken, then to make progression. And," he goes on, "to speak truly, 'Antiquity is the world's youth.' These times are the ancient times, when the world is ancient, and not those which we account ancient *ordine retrogrado*, by a computation backward from ourselves."

This caution is not less necessary in our own days than in those of Bacon. The cry to stand upon the old ways is still taken up, sometimes reasonably and usefully, sometimes unreasonably and mischievously. By the old ways people commonly mean their own old ways, their own prejudices, interests, evil habits, and I commend to all who would know the truth on this subject the deep and suggestive words of Bacon.

* *Adv. of Learning. Works*, iii. 293. † *Ib.*, 290.

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To his testimony I may add that of Pascal:* "Those," he says, "whom we call the ancients were truly new in all things, and formed properly the infancy of mankind; and as we have joined to their knowledge the experience of the ages which followed them, it is among us that this antiquity is to be found which we revere in the others."

4. Note, yet again, another danger, that of mere unpractical speculative knowledge, sought after for purposes of display, or of mere captious controversy. And here we may well remember Bacon's caution;† that knowledge "must be subject to that use for which God hath granted it; which is the benefit and relief of the state and society of man; for otherwise all manner of knowledge becometh malign and serpentine." And again, he says, "That all knowledge is to be limited by religion, and to be referred to use and action."‡ By which he does not mean that no knowledge is to be valued which cannot be used for tangible, material profit. A passage from the *Advancement of Learning* § will show his real thoughts on this subject: "The greatest error of all the rest is the mistaking or misplacing of the last or furthest end of knowledge. For men have entered into a desire of learning and knowledge, sometimes upon

* *Fragment d'un traité du vide. Pensées* (Havet), p. 519. (*Cf.* p. 511).
† *Interp. of Nature. Works*, iii. 221, 222. *Cf. ib.*, p. 232.
‡ *Ib.*, p. 218. § *Works*, vol. iii. p. 294.

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a natural curiosity and inquisitive appetite; sometimes to entertain their minds with variety and delight; sometimes for ornament and reputation; and sometimes to enable them to victory of wit and contradiction; and most times for lucre and profession; and seldom sincerely to give a true account of their gift of reason, to the benefit and use of men . . . . Howbeit, I do not mean, when I speak of use and action, that end before-mentioned of the applying of knowledge to lucre and profession; for I am not ignorant how much that diverteth and interrupteth the prosecution and advancement of knowledge . . . . But as both heaven and earth do conspire and contribute to the use and benefit of man, so the end ought to be, from both philosophies to separate and reject vain speculations and whatsoever is empty and void, and to preserve and augment whatsoever is solid and fruitful."

It is the same caution which S. Paul gives us when he warns men not to be wise in their own conceit, not to seek that windy, unpractical, loveless knowledge, which has for many of us a very powerful attraction, but which only inflates, puffs up, as S. Paul says, or still more, as Bacon affirms, becomes malignant and poisonous.

But among all the counsels to be given to seekers after knowledge, there is none more important than this: In the pursuit of knowledge there must be

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devotion, labour, toil—the ardent devotion of love. Truth will not yield herself to every chance comer who seeks her hand. She must be convinced, before she surrenders herself, that she has gained the affections of her suitor. And she demands the most unquestionable proofs of devotion.

There is no knowledge without labour. That which is easily gained is of small value. A motto, attributed to S. Francis of Assisi, which was early adopted by the great Italian Savonarola, and ardently cherished by him throughout his life, deserves to be written on the memory of every real student: "A man knows as much as he works." It is a truth which is perhaps more copiously illustrated than any other which bears upon this great subject, and yet it is one which is widely ignored. There are many people who forget that knowledge, like all other possessions which are worth having, costs a great deal—who imagine that it falls into the laps of men without their undergoing any toil in securing it. There could not be a greater mistake. "If a man will not work neither shall he eat," is a maxim as true of the fruits of knowledge as of other kinds of food: idleness and drowsiness, in the intellectual as well as in the material world, will clothe a man with rags.

There is one last kind of knowledge of which I must not omit to say something. I mean the

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knowledge of God. I do not mean to speak of the methods by which this knowledge is to be attained. I have, in fact, already done so. We have been reminded that the way to the kingdom of God and to the kingdom of nature is through the same gate of lowliness, and lies along the same path of self-denial.

But I must say something on the infinite value and importance of this knowledge for general reasons, because in any case it would be wrong to omit it, and for a particular and special reason, because it is, in these days, not only slighted, but *declared to be an impossibility.* If it were said that the being and attributes of God were apprehended in a different manner from the ordinary objects of human knowledge, we should of course agree to such a statement. When, however, it is said that the knowledge of God is a mere imagination, a fancy, a dream, which has no reality, and no real influence in human life, then we must answer that the knowledge of God is as necessary to us as any other knowledge; since we actually crave for it, and are satisfied with it in the same way as we are with all other knowledge; that we obtain this knowledge in a manner as legitimate, as rational, as our manner of acquiring any other kind of knowledge; and that this knowledge may be tested in the same way, considering its nature, as any other knowledge.

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The heart of man crieth out for God, for the living God. As man's material organization craves for food, as the eye of man seeks light, and delights in beauty, as the ear of man is satisfied with sweet sounds, so the spiritual nature of man longs for God and obtains satisfaction in Him.

But we are told we have no means of knowing this. Such an answer really assumes great ignorance on the part of the advocate of religion. What would be said of us if we were to tell our fellow-men that they had no knowledge of an external world? I do not know—let us put it in this way—that shelves and books or human beings are around me. I can be sure only that I have certain sensations. If they carried their scepticism to this length, it would at least be consistent; but what would be the reply? Why this: It would be possible, of course, that one person might be mistaken; but this conviction is the conviction of mankind at large. All men believe it; all men assume it without even thinking of it; all men act upon it certainly, universally, necessarily. A man who denied these universal convictions, or did not act upon them, would be regarded as destitute of reason and shut up in a mad-house. Precisely so. And why am I to doubt my moral convictions, my spiritual longings, my belief in a spiritual world, which are as clear and strong in me as any others,

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and are not mine alone, but the common possession of mankind at large?

My sense of responsibility, so far from being an illusion, is shared by all who have not destroyed their moral faculties, which, undoubtedly, are capable of being destroyed like our other powers, intellectual or physical. This sense of responsibility is assumed and acted upon by myself and my fellow-men in all the relations of life. These cravings of heart lead me to seek for Divine truth and knowledge, just as I am driven by other impulses to seek for other kinds of knowledge; and the knowledge of God and of His will comes to me from without, in a perfectly legitimate and reasonable manner, just as all other knowledge comes. It is true I have no absolute knowledge of God, as it is called; but I have no absolute knowledge of anything. It is only as things are related to myself that I know anything of them; and the reality of every kind of knowledge must be tested by action and experience. This test is applicable to our knowledge of God no less than to natural knowledge; for this, too, is a distinct and appreciable power in human life. I confess that, if we cannot be thus assured of the reality of our knowledge of God, I can see no way of escape from universal doubt.

But this knowledge of God is not only possible, it is the highest and the most blessed of which men are capable. All other knowledge is incomplete

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without the knowledge of God; for that which all knowledge reveals to us is but a part of His ways. Until a man knows God, he cannot know himself: he cannot know his privileges, his responsibilities, his duties. "In Thy light shall we see light." It is in God that we know ourselves, our fellow-men, our place on earth, and all the duties connected with it; and in no other way can they be known. This knowledge casts light down upon the path which we tread on earth, and forward upon the unknown way which we must take when this life is over.

Surely then whatever knowledge we may seek after, and I do not disparage any field of human investigation, we shall be neglecting the best and the highest if we do not seek to acquaint ourselves with God. And this knowledge is now possible for us. It is no longer necessary to ask, "Who shall ascend up into heaven?" to bring us this knowledge; since Christ has come down from heaven to reveal the Most High. The only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth—we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father; and He alone can reveal that Father.

In His light we shall see light, and walk in light—the light of truth, of knowledge, and of love.

*** On the subject of this chapter, besides many other books that might be mentioned, I would strongly

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recommend Bacon's "Essays," "Novum Organum," and "Advancement of Learning"; Pascal's "Thoughts" (Havet's Edition is, on the whole, the most useful); and Sir John Herschel's "Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy."

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II.

ON THE FORMATION OF OPINION.

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II.

ON THE FORMATION OF OPINION.

THE subject which we are now about to consider is the formation of opinion. It is very closely connected with that of the acquisition of knowledge, and is hardly inferior to it in importance. A writer of our own days has said that he cares nothing for a man's opinions, but only for what he *knows*. But such a remark is an ignoring of the very conditions of human thought and action. A great proportion of our convictions must be based upon probability rather than certainty, must be of the nature of opinion, rather than knowledge.

In fact, we are under the necessity of acting in many cases in which certainty is unattainable. This subject cannot be put in a clearer light than has been done in the introduction to Bishop Butler's *Analogy*, in which the author points out that, while to "an infinite intelligence" every "object of knowledge" is "certainly true, or certainly false"; "to us, probability is the very guide of life." Let it be remembered,

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too, that *faith* itself, from the intellectual and critical side, is simply opinion. That which is to me an object of faith, it may be faith firm, undoubting, assured, to another is only my opinion.

I. It is already apparent that *our opinions are of immense importance*, seeing that they do, so to speak, rule our whole life.

This fact has often been lost sight of. Writers of power and influence have permitted themselves to use language on this subject which reason could not justify. Even Pope says:

> "For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight,
> His can't be wrong whose life is in the right."

But this statement, although, like most of such sayings, it has an important truth involved in it, is certainly false and mischievous, seeing that it ignores alike the influence of a man's life upon his faith, and the influence of the truth or falsehood of his faith over the rightness of his life.

The opposite view has been stated by Mr. Ruskin with his usual trenchant force, and, I may say, with his usual exaggeration.* "It has been a prevalent notion," he says, "in the minds of well-disposed persons, that, if they acted according to their own conscience, they must, therefore, be doing right. But," he goes on, "they assume, in feeling or asserting this, either that there is no law of God, or that it

* *Fors Clavigera*, June, 1875.

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cannot be known; but only felt and conjectured. . . . You must not do," he says, "what YOU think right, but, whether you or anybody think, or don't think it, what *is* right."

Here there is the same one-sidedness as in the lines of Pope, although in the opposite direction. A man *is* bound to obey his own conscience, and he is right in obeying it. It does not follow, however, that he is then *doing right*. A man may in the most conscientious way be doing the greatest mischief. But this only brings out more strongly the enormous importance of right opinion.

This importance of right and true convictions is illustrated in every sphere and relation of life.

The ordinary actions of our life are determined by our opinion. Whether we think of religion or politics, of the affairs of the Church or those of the State, we see that opinion is the guide of our life. Let us note, for instance, *the influence of religious opinion*. Can it be said that it makes no difference what a man's opinions are on the subjects of Human Sinfulness, Divine Grace, the Sacrifice of Christ, the Gift of the Holy Ghost, the Ordinances of the Church? These are some of those "modes of faith" for which "graceless zealots" are supposed to "fight." Is it quite graceless to fight for such things? Would it not, on the contrary, be most culpable indifference to regard these questions as of no importance? If the state-

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ments of Christian doctrine on these subjects be untrue, then they are enormous falsehoods; if they are true, then they are of infinite importance.

But it is the same everywhere. Opinion is our guide and master in things general and social, as well as in things personal and individual. "Opinion," some one has said, "is queen of the world." It was a remark which greatly impressed Pascal: "I should much like," he says, "to see the Italian book, of which I know only the title, which is in itself worth many books, *Della Opinione Regina del Mondo*. I subscribe to it without knowing it, except to anything that may be wrong in it, if there is anything wrong." Montesquieu says the same thing of custom, and Herodotus of law;* but these are only the expression and embodiment of opinion.

"Opinion is queen of the world." Every commonwealth, every kingdom, empire, republic, is ruled, and must be ruled, by the opinion of its people, by what we call "public opinion." That opinion may be right or wrong. Sometimes it is right, sometimes it is wrong; but in any case it rules; and it is of no use complaining that it rules. You might as well complain of the law of gravitation. It must do so; and we may do our best to change it, if we think it wrong; and it is our duty to change it if we think it wrong; but, right or wrong, it rules the empire.

* *Cf.* Pascal (Ed. Havet), p. 41.

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The only exception is found in countries where there exists no public opinion; but even there opinion rules, although it be not what we call "public opinion." Under old despotisms, the autocrat rules by the public opinion of the small body who surround the throne and support it. When he breaks with that, unless he can throw himself upon another body of organized opinion, he is usually assassinated. In an upstart despotism, the worst of all kinds of government because it is established on the ruins of liberty, it is still by opinion that the despot rules. The first Bonaparte, Napoleon the Great, was the representative of the opinion out of which his power arose; but he was at last crushed by opinion, by the public opinion of Europe. The second Bonaparte was the creature of public opinion, and fell when he was no longer supported by it.

Is it necessary that I should say more on this point? Reflect that wrong opinions must necessarily lead to wrong actions, must, in fact, make all our life wrong. The more conscientious men are, in such a case, the more mischievous they may be; for, as we have heard, doing what we *think* right may be one thing and doing what *is* right may be quite another.

II. As regards the general principles to be observed in the formation of opinion, we have very little to say in addition to what was brought forward on the acquisition of knowledge. The two great elements in

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the mind of the inquirer must always be *humility* and *devotion*.

By *humility* I mean, of course, the sense of our own fallibility, the knowledge of the enormous difficulty of arriving at truth, the fear of going wrong in our judgements. By *devotion* I mean the steadfast resolve to spare no pains to ascertain what is true and right and good, to yield to no sloth that would hinder us in our search after truth, to take as much pains in the pursuit of it as though we were striving after something upon which our happiness, our very life depended. We must *buy* the truth. We must go after it, as he who sought for the goodly pearl, and parted with all that he had, in order that he might buy it.

It may appear that this is making a very large demand, in fact, a demand much too large, upon ordinary people who have to form opinions on a great many subjects. Yet it is impossible to form opinions, which shall be of any value, on any other principles. The labour bestowed upon the search is the exact measure of the value of the result. A man's opinions are worth exactly what they cost him. If we take them up without reflection, even if they are tolerably true, they will be of comparatively little value. On the other hand, if we go astray after the most earnest and laborious efforts, those opinions so acquired, even if only partially true, will yet have an immense practical value for ourselves. They will give definiteness to our

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life: I may say they will lead us out of their own imperfections and errors into fuller truth.

Here is one of the reasons why it is so much more difficult to form right opinions in our more advanced years than in our youth. It is more difficult to form those habits of thought which are necessary for the purpose, and which we have neglected to acquire.

On this point Locke speaks with great emphasis. He says it is hardly possible for men who have grown up in thoughtless ignorance to change in this respect. "What, then," he asks, "can grown men never be improved or enlarged in their understandings? I say not so, but this I think I may say, that it will not be done without industry and application, which will require more time and pains than grown men, settled in their course of life, will allow to it, and therefore very seldom is done." *

Of course, there will be a great difference in the amount of labour required to form one opinion and another. Almighty God has graciously made it easy for us to form judgements on the commonest actions of our life. Our every-day duties are commonly plain enough. "The wayfaring man, though a fool," need not err in these. The grand moral and religious distinctions by which men's actions are determined are, for the most part, plain enough. If we go beyond

* *Conduct of Understanding*, § 6. *Principles. Cf.* Butler, *Anal.*, i. c. 5.

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these, if we will judge and act (as we are sometimes called to do) in matters of greater difficulty, we must be willing to undergo greater labour.

As a general rule, the matters which are the least imperative as duties are those upon which we have least need to make up our minds, and which present the greatest difficulty to the inquirer after truth. Take as an example the forming of a judgement respecting our fellow-men. The formation of such opinions need not very often be a duty, and they should be formed with great care and deliberation. It is related of Queen Elizabeth that, at "the end of her long reign, she was able to say that she had never formed an opinion as to the guilt of an accused person upon the first reports which reached her." * It is a principle worthy of the "strong mind and character" of this great queen. It is equally a proof of the mental weakness and incapacity of a large number of our fellow-creatures that they do form judgements instantly, readily, on the very first reports that are brought to them; especially, one is sorry to add, when they contain anything unfavourable to another person.

So far our remarks have been general. We now proceed to give some more particular hints with regard to the manner of forming opinions. I begin with a very simple piece of advice, which is very

* Thiersch, *Christian Commonwealth.*

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greatly needed, and which flows very naturally out of what has already been said on this subject.

1. *On many points*, I would say, *be content to have no opinion at all.*

It is well remarked by Locke that "Nobody is under an obligation to know everything"; and yet the ordinary run of fairly educated men seem to think that they ought to be ashamed of not knowing everything. If you had time to go and sit for a whole day in a club, you would receive the most remarkable illustration of the truth of this observation. You would find men, on every side of you, ready to give the most distinct and assured opinion on all the topics that happened to be brought forward; no matter how little they might be acquainted with the subjects to which they belonged. Now and then a modest man would say, "I know nothing about it, and am not able to express an opinion"; but he would certainly be an exception. And yet there is no disgrace in being ignorant of many things—of most things, especially of those things which do not concern our own life and work.

Be contented, therefore, in many cases to have no distinct opinion. It is the part of wisdom and common sense as well as humility.

I do not, of course, advise that men should refrain from forming opinions when they have sufficient opportunities and means of doing so; much less that

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in cases in which they are required to act, they should act blindly without considering the grounds and principles upon which rational beings should base all their purposes and actions. But what I mean to say is this, that, where no duty requires us to form an opinion, and where at the same time we have no great power or opportunity of judging, we may refrain from the attempt to form an opinion on subjects which are greatly controverted, without being ashamed of not having an opinion on such matters.

There is no folly, no stupidity, no cowardice, on the contrary, there may be truest intelligence and courage, in saying, "I have not formed an opinion on a certain subject, because I have not had the means of ascertaining all the facts, without a knowledge of which an opinion would be of no value."

2. A second counsel which I venture to offer is this: *Be contented to act on many opinions which you are not yourself enabled to verify.* I mean, to verify *intellectually.*

This may, at first hearing, sound like a very hard saying, inasmuch as it appears to advise that men shall act merely from habit and custom, and not as rational and intelligent creatures. Yet it is what we all do; and, I may say, what most of us do every day of our life.

Consider, for a moment, what are the two great elements in all opinion. They are authority and

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personal investigation. I know it will sound very superstitious to some persons to speak of authority as a proper ground of opinion; and yet it is with authority that our life on earth begins and ends. And I may add that it is the great question of all ages, in regard to human judgements, to determine the separate spheres of authority and personal investigation; just as it has been the great question, in regard to human actions, to separate the spheres of authority and personal liberty.

Let me adduce some examples:—

I might begin with *religion*, which, of course, rests upon authority; for it supposes a revelation of some kind or other, a revelation which rests upon the authority of God. But I prefer to take the example of *science*. In one sense there is no authority in science. We do not accept Kepler's law, or any of the other discoveries in astronomy, because of the eminence of its discoverer, or of those teachers by whom it has been accepted and commended. We accept it because it agrees with the facts of observation, because it explains those facts. But, as far as the great majority of the human race are concerned, they receive the results of scientific inquiry on authority. They have no opportunity of investigating them personally. They are incapable of doing so. You and I believe that the earth is round, that it turns upon its axis, that it goes round the sun. We have never verified

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these doctrines. If we believed our senses, we should say that the world was flat and immoveable, and that the sun comes up from the eastern horizon, and goes down into the western. Yet our senses do not deceive us, because we are credibly informed that it is not so; and we believe this doctrine, although we are quite unable to verify it. It is so in many questions of religion. We are not all theologians. There are very few even of those whose business it is to teach religion who are able thoroughly to investigate all the grounds in history and in reason, upon which it rests. Yet we act upon the conviction that its principles are true.

And in doing so we are not working in the dark, nor are we behaving irrationally. Although we may be unable to investigate all the grounds of our belief, we may easily test it by practical experience. We have *reason*, we have *conscience*, and we have the *testimony of its effects* in human society. We may refuse, for example, to receive as part of Divine Revelation that which is self-contradictory, that which contradicts the fundamental truths of reason. We may refuse to accept as true that which is repugnant to those moral instincts which God has implanted within us; and we may refuse to believe that that is a true religious system which blights instead of blessing the people among whom it is held and practised.

If I am asked why Mohammedanism may not be as true as Christianity, I can at least point to its destruc-

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tive effects; and if I am told that the Reformation was a mistake, that the Pope is infallible, and that it is my duty to return at once to the Roman obedience, I may hesitate to abandon myself to a system which has certainly not been a blessing to those countries which have yielded themselves up most completely to its power.

But, in the case of many of our fellow-creatures, we may go further, and say, that they may quite reasonably act upon opinions which they have the means of testing only by their own life and by the experience of the narrow circle in which they move. For example, a man may say—"These are the doctrines and principles which I was taught in my youth. I received them as true, and I have no means of knowing whether they can be defended on the grounds of reason and history. But one thing I know, that these principles have formed beautiful human characters and lives, lives full of truth and righteousness and goodness and love and devotion. I feel that they strengthen all that is good in me, and depress everything which is low and base and ignoble, and I therefore cling to them as the noblest possession, as the greatest blessing of my life." I say there is nothing irrational or unworthy in a man's taking such a view of the principles in which he has been brought up. It may be that such an one has little right to be a controversialist, and it would be well for such if they avoided the thorny

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paths of religious polemics; but they may live a true, a brave, and a noble life, which shall be full of inward satisfaction, peace, and hope to themselves, and full of richest blessing to others.

3. But I must speak not so much of abstaining from forming opinions as of the manner in which they may be formed; and I remark at once that we must *regard the possession of right opinions as, in our own case, a possibility.* In other words we must believe that God has given us reason, rational powers, powers of thinking and of thinking aright.

It is a mistake to say that religion disparages reason. Religion says that reason could not discover certain truths unless they were revealed, and this is no more than to say that our eyes could not see certain objects unless they were brought before them. But this is not disparaging our eyes. When we say that a mill cannot produce flour unless corn is put into it, we are not disparaging the mill; its province is not to create, but to grind. And the mind of man is the mill that grinds—the eye that sees.

It is the abuse of reason that the Bible condemns. The use of reason it everywhere acknowledges. It appeals to the reason and conscience of man on every side. Lacordaire admirably remarks, that "God has given us reason to show us He has no fear of reason"; and it is observed, with equal truth, by

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Vinet, that, "if reason can do nothing, it cannot even prove that it can do nothing. If it proves that it is nothing, then it has the power to prove something." And the same writer remarks: "Reason is not the efficient cause of the sentiments that are begotten within us; it can only bring us face to face with the facts, and enable them to speak to us."

If we would be Christians in the true sense of the word, if we would be thoughtful Christians, who are ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them, we must not profess or pretend for one moment to disparage our noblest attribute, that attribute without which religion would be simply an impossibility.

4. The next remark is at once the most obvious and the most important. In the formation of opinion, as in the acquisition of knowledge, *we must have a supreme regard to truth.* Truth must always be preferred; and neither prejudice nor interest, neither our personal nor our party prepossessions, must be allowed to stand in the way.

Of course, I am quite aware that, in the absolute sense of the words, this is impossible. It might then seem useless to insist upon it, or even to mention it; but such an inference would be most thoughtless and most false. As well might we blot out of the Sermon on the Mount the Divine words, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," because all men are sinful and imperfect.

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We know that it is by keeping this glorious standard before us that we ever rise above the poor, low level of our former selves. And so it is by setting before our minds the attainment of perfect truth that we ever escape from any of the falsehoods and confusions in which we are involved. I recognize the difficulty of complying with this requirement. If I can only impress upon you the greatness of the difficulty I shall have rendered you no small service in your efforts to overcome it. But I must still repeat, with all possible earnestness, seek truth, in spite of prejudice, in spite of interest, in spite of party.

(1) *Prejudice*—what does it mean? It means our preconceived notions, whether true or false. And we have no need to start with the presumption that they are probably false. Most of our convictions, especially our practical principles of life, are probably true in the main. But when we come to the thoughtful consideration of any subject which we may be required to investigate, we must start with this conviction, that our previous notions must be either verified or changed. If they are true, then the most searching examination will only strengthen them. We must at least bring them face to face with acknowledged facts, sincerely, earnestly, honestly—or as honestly as we can. If they are compatible with the facts and are confirmed by them, it is well; we shall return to them with fresh gratitude, with deeper

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conviction. If they are incompatible with the facts, if our opinions and undeniable facts cannot stand together, then our opinions must undergo change or modification.

I might select for illustration a subject which is coming to be discussed with renewed interest and earnestness (by some persons at least) in our own days: the question of Church and State. There are very few thinking men who can come to the study of that subject without prejudice. To one class of persons the union of Church and State is simply a moral necessity, an absolute duty. To another class it is as plainly a positive iniquity. Neither of these classes of persons is at all capable of taking a calm and rational view of the subject. It cannot be an iniquity, because under certain circumstances God has sanctioned it. It cannot be a moral necessity, because in certain circumstances it is a practical impossibility. There must be some middle ground for a reasonable discussion of the subject; and on that middle ground there are multifarious considerations on both sides which demand patient study and meditation. A Christian patriot will simply ask what is for the glory of God and the good of the community; and it is quite possible for men equally honest and equally intelligent to start from these principles and to arrive at different conclusions.

(2) A second hindrance to the formation of right

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opinion, closely connected with the former, is found in our *interests*.

It is hardly possible for a man to consider any subject—especially one of a practical character—without asking how it will affect himself; or rather, this thought will present itself without any asking. I may go further and say that such a consideration will bias him without being consciously present with him at all.

We see this in the presence of proposed legislation. By whom are proposals of this kind ordinarily opposed? Naturally enough by those whose interests are assailed, or apparently assailed. It is said that the clergy, as a class, opposed the abolition of the Corn Laws, because they feared it would lead to the reduction of their tithes. And it is quite possible that the clergy, like other men, did not wish their incomes to be diminished. It is said that the innkeepers were opposed to the early closing of their houses as at variance with their interests. I read, the other day, that the Coventry weavers were in favour of free-trade in everything except ribbons.

We might illustrate the subject by a thousand instances. It is very hard indeed for a man to take a clear and dispassionate view of the public interest in a matter by which his own private interest is affected.

And yet it is only as we can rise above these

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personal considerations that our judgements have any real value, that we can have any reliance upon the accuracy of our own opinions. It is only as we care for truth, and believe that it is better than error, even if the error should happen for a time to benefit ourselves, that our opinions are likely to be true opinions.

(3) Another great hindrance—and the last that we are to name—is *party feeling*. It is generally believed to be the strongest and the most baneful of all. Some time ago I was speaking to one who had had large experience of public life, on the terrible bias communicated to our judgements by personal feeling. "Yes," he answered, "but it is nothing to party feeling." On the whole, I have come to agree with him, that there is nothing so false, nothing so cruel, nothing so wicked and unscrupulous as party feeling, when it gains thorough dominion over a man.

It blinds his understanding, it hardens his heart, it perverts his conscience. I am not prepared, however, to deny that party organization may be a necessity. Mr. Ruskin says, "Men associate in parties only by sacrificing their opinions, or by having none worth sacrificing; and the effect of party government is always to develop hostilities and hypocrisies, and to extinguish ideas." *

On the other hand, it is asserted that the government of a country could not be carried on without

* *Fors Clavigera*, No. 1, p. 7.

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party organization. Party, it is said, is organized opinion, and, if you believe that it is for the good of the community that you should give effect to your opinions, you must organize for this purpose. In other words, you must act in parties.

It may be then that the existence of parties in Church and State is a necessary evil, and I do not attempt to determine this question. But no one will deny that party feeling is an enormous obstacle to the formation of true opinions. Even in the judgement of matters of fact, you will find the most opposite results arrived at, when the proofs presented are the same. The simple explanation of the matter is to be found in the fact that one party is determined to believe in the alleged facts simply because they consider them helpful to their own party interests, while the other party, for the opposite reason, is equally resolved to disbelieve them.

But it may be asked, Is there to be no loyalty to party?

I answer that loyalty to party must always be subordinate to loyalty to truth.

The greatest philosopher of antiquity (he was a heathen, but how much might Christians learn from him!) set forth certain opinions which, he said, were at variance with the teaching of Plato. It was true, he said, that Plato was his friend; but truth was a still dearer friend. Is it not sad that the disciples

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of Jesus should need to go to Aristotle to learn a lesson so simple, so fundamental?

Loyalty to truth is loyalty to God. Loyalty to party, when it is opposed to truth, is not only disloyalty to God; it is disloyalty to man and to the conscience itself. Be loyal to your party when the only sacrifice is your own private feelings or your own private interests. But there must be limits to such loyalty. When your party deserts its principles, when it deserts truth, God, humanity, then be true to God, be true to yourself, whatever it may cost you.

5. There is one question which demands a moment's consideration; one which is very closely connected with the subject of prejudice, on which something has already been said: I refer to the *changing of opinion*.

It is a subject on which it is very easy to lay down general principles which cannot be gainsaid; and yet it is a subject on which it is often very difficult to know the right application of those principles. For instance we can say, without hesitation, that it is lawful to change one's opinion, and in certain cases it is necessary, and our bounden duty. To refuse to change from error to truth is to confess one's stupidity or want of principle. To say that a man is bound, through life, to adhere to the opinions which he was taught as a child, is not merely to imply that every one is taught opinions sufficiently good for the con-

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duct of his life, but that humanity is incapable of learning or of improvement. It is hardly necessary to refute a theory so monstrous, which some persons are foolish enough to assert, but which no one is unwise enough to act upon.

On the other hand, to be continually changing one's opinions is a sign of inconsiderateness and inconstancy, and it is a proof that our adoption of opinions is of no value. The love of novelty, or an inherent weakness which is incapable of resisting every new impression, may account for such changes, not the love of truth.

But there is another remark which it is no less necessary to offer on this subject. It is quite lawful for a man to change his opinion, and almost every one does so in matters small or great, and sometimes without knowing it; but it is not lawful for a man to hold, at the same time, opinions which are incompatible and self-contradictory. I may add that this is constantly done; and it arises from the neglect to refer our opinions to deep and universal principles. It is one of the commonest things, and one of the most irrational. It arises from the fact that men are moved by passion, by prejudice, by interest, by party-spirit, and not by a love of truth or a desire to carry it out. They will give expression to sentiments, and commit themselves to courses of conduct, which can be justified only on certain principles; but these

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principles they utterly neglect and abjure when they come to a different application of them.

There is no remedy for this, but that which is a remedy for every evil, the *subduing of self*. When we know that the will of God is our best guide, and the love of God our best possession, and the favour of God the sure ground of happiness, then, and not till then, we shall love truth and seek after it, whether it commends itself to our prejudices or not.

6. Finally, I would observe that, in order to *test the truth* of our opinions, in order that they may be of any real value to us, we must *live* them and *work* them.

It is at a glance apparent that no opinion can be of any value unless it is carried out into life and practice; for our opinions are the guide of our life, and their genuineness can be proved in no other way than by giving effect to them in our life.

But this, which is the evidence of the genuineness of our opinions, is also the test of their truth. Let principles slumber, and you cannot tell whether they are true or false, good or bad. Put them in motion, work them, apply them to the actual business of life; and then you will see what there is in them, whether they will stand, or break down.

If we consider the mere terms of the subject on which we have been meditating, it will seem one of the simplest which could be considered.

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If we look deeper, it will appear one of the greatest, the most awful. For it involves truth and goodness on the one hand, and falsehood and evil on the other hand: it involves the usefulness and beneficence of our life under the guidance of truth and righteousness, or its uselessness and mischievousness under the guidance of falsehood and evil.

A man who thinks it unimportant must be a mere trifler. A man who cares little about it can have no ardent love of truth; and he who cares little for truth can know little of God.

*** Since this chapter was written, Mr. Gladstone has contributed two articles to the "Nineteenth Century" (Nos. 1 and 5), which will be found most useful, on the "Influence of Authority in the Formation of Opinion."

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III.

ON THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

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ON THE FORMATION OF CHARACTER.

AMONG those things which constitute the power or the weakness of human life, character must be allowed to have a foremost place; and for this reason principally, that it is the very centre and unity of every life. To this everything else leads up—thoughts, words, deeds, habits; and from this everything in turn proceeds. In asserting the pre-eminence of character we are not ignoring the other elements of power by which one man is separated almost immeasurably from other men—force of intellect, power of work, and the like. If, however, we use character in the more restricted sense, as representing moral disposition, it is greater than these powers, and in fact has much to do with their development and maintenance; and, if we use it in the larger sense, it embraces them. In taking a comprehensive view of the subject, we must have regard to both of these meanings of the word: not only as representing certain moral and religious

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habits, but as expressing the unity of a man's inward life, in his power of thought and reflection, of sensibility and conviction, of will and action—in fact, as representing the whole inner condition of the man.

I. Before, however, we proceed to speak of the power of character, we must try to understand its *meaning* and *reality*.

1. The word, which is Greek, meant originally an instrument for marking or stamping; afterwards, and more commonly, the stamp or impression made upon anything; and so, by application, the characteristic marks, the whole disposition of a man's mind and will. In our own ordinary usage it means, first, and somewhat improperly, a man's *reputation*, and secondly, and more properly, the whole of a man's *moral and mental disposition*.

With reference to the first use of the word, it has been said with truth that "a man's character is his history"; and this is not altogether inapplicable to that which we have called the more proper use of the word; for indeed a man's character is exactly the *result* of his history, if we take that word in the whole extent of its meaning.

2. The word represents a thing which is a *reality*. It is not a mere expression for a set of qualities which co-exist without unity or cohesion. Where we use the word, we employ it to designate a distinct stamp which we recognise as separating one man from

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another. Where this stamp does not exist, we speak of a person as being characterless—not without certain qualities good, bad, or indifferent, but as being without those distinctive marks which give an impression of unity to the mind.

Most men of your acquaintance, for example, have a certain place in your thoughts—greatly varying, of course, in clearness and distinctness; and those with whom you have most to do have a certain value attached to them. I do not mean that you are guilty of the rashness of deciding as to the exact value of their moral character; but you have formed a certain estimate of their fitness for particular works, and you have probably made up your mind as to the relation which you would wish that they should sustain to yourself. If you are asked whether you would like to work with certain men or not, in some cases you at once answer in the affirmative, in other cases you are equally ready with a negative answer; in other cases you take time to consider it. If you are asked whether a certain person is qualified for a particular work, you say of one, he is the very man to whom you would entrust it, of another, that he is the very last whom you would consider fitted for it, and so forth. It is an illustration of the reality of character. You feel that there is such a thing as a distinctive stamp on a man.

And it enters into everything. You see a man at

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his work; but, if you knew him well, you knew before how he would do it; and what he would be like in his recreations. If you know him well, you know his mode of thought, of speech, of action. You say of him—That would be his judgement on a certain point—that is exactly what I should have expected him to say. I should have been sure that, in such circumstances, he would act in that way.

It would, therefore, be quite impossible to exaggerate the importance of this subject. Character is a thing so real in its existence, so universal in its influence, that no one who is not morally reckless will think lightly of its formation, whether in his own case, or in the case of others, especially of those the formation of whose character he has it in his power to influence.

Now there is one consideration which adds greatly to our estimate of the importance of this subject. We cannot prevent the formation of character in ourselves and others: we are, in fact, constantly contributing to its formation in ourselves, constantly influencing others and assisting in moulding their characters. Even the man who hardly believes in character, if there be such a man—even the man who hardly ever thinks on the subject—is, in reality, no less engaged in this work than the man who is thinking most about it, and striving most earnestly in the conscious work of moulding his own character

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and influencing others. Let this be quite clear to us—it is a work which no man can avoid.

No sooner, however, do we think of the universality of character, than we are impressed by its infinite *diversities*.

Thus there are strong characters and weak characters, there are consistent characters and inconsistent, which is very nearly another name for the same thing. There are characters which we call high-principled, by which we mean lives which are under the influence of high and noble motives; and there are those which we call unprincipled, by which we mean characters which are either under the influence of low, ignoble, or vicious motives and principles, or else those which seem to be under the guidance of no special principle at all. More generally speaking, we may say there are characters which we pronounce to be good, and others we unhesitatingly pronounce to be bad, and so forth.

II. Now, in speaking of the formation of character, we must try to set before our minds the ideal of such a character as we should desire to possess for ourselves, as we should delight to behold in others; and then we must consider by what means such a character may be formed.

What, then, are the *traits* or *features* of such a character? How should we describe a character such as we could regard with complacency? What are the

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moral qualities which we most admire in others, which we should most desire to see in ourselves? which we are sure would be most pleasing to the best of our fellow-men, and most acceptable to Almighty God?

I will try to give plain, clear, simple answers to these questions. They will form, if we are in earnest, both *rules* and *tests*.

1. Now, I suppose there is one quality which all men will agree to regard as fundamental. I mean the quality of *truthfulness*. I do not mean mere truthfulness of speech, although that will, of course, be its ordinary accompaniment, but *truthfulness of mind*—that simplicity and sincerity which gives a value to every other characteristic, the absence of which mars every other virtue and grace.

It is a remarkable fact that falsehood has not usually been numbered among the cardinal sins. It is not one of those seven which are commonly called by that name. Without dwelling upon other reasons for this omission, there is one which is at once apparent, and which is deeply significant. I mean this—that without truth no virtue can be real. When you speak of gold, you mean pure gold, gold itself without any foreign admixture. If we do not enumerate truth among the cardinal virtues—if there is no one of the ten commandments which explicitly requires it, or universally condemns falsehood—it is because truth

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must be the basis of the whole structure. This is evident, and every one admits it.

Yet it is a great thing to ask for; it is a rare thing to find in its integrity. There is in fallen man a deep-rooted insincerity and untruthfulness, a perverseness of thought and sentiment which would be wonderful, if we were not so familiar with it; and therefore I would most earnestly utter the warning to those who may care to be warned on such a subject—that no one will ever succeed in forming a character of any greatness or nobility in himself or others, who does not strive, with all his might, to give to this quality the first and highest place in all his thoughts.

2. Closely allied with truth is *courage*. It is, indeed, its surest and most necessary bulwark and defence. It is a quality to which all men are agreed to do homage. There may be men who think lightly of truthfulness, who hold that untruthfulness of speech may sometimes be a necessity, and who do not place sufficient value upon truthfulness of mind. But I am not aware that, in the whole history of the world, any one has thought well of cowardice, or failed to admire courage or bravery. I suppose there is nothing that we should like less to be called than "a coward." There are few words which thoughtful and good men will hesitate so long about applying to another, because there are few words which would be so

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indicative of loathing and contempt, if such feelings were lawful for us.

And yet our admiration of this quality does not always lead us to a true judgement of its nature. Many actions which we are at first inclined to put down to courage are really cowardly actions. Many which we deem cowardly are most brave and courageous. It is not always courageous when you are struck to strike again. It is not always courageous to give back the hot, angry retort when you are reviled. Sometimes it may need courage to do these things. More frequently it needs courage to avoid doing them.

Every one has heard of Sir Philip Sydney; but every one may not remember one of the greatest proofs which he ever gave of his courage. He was a great soldier; and distinguished himself in the wars of the Netherlands, when England was giving her aid to the Dutch Republic, in its struggle against the then mighty power of Spain. But it is not so much of his skill as a commander, of his bravery as a soldier that we think, when we recall his courage and magnanimity; it is of his patience under insult. A fool, who had quarrelled with him, tried to provoke him to fight: when he could not succeed, he went so far as to spit in Sydney's face. What was the hero's reply? "Young man," he said, "if I could as easily wipe your blood from my conscience as I can wipe this insult from my face, I would this moment take your

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life." Which was the truly brave man in that case? The insolent fool, or the patient hero? You are ready with the answer. It is an example from which we have much to learn on the subject of courage.

True courage is a mighty power, because it is the symbol of truth and devotion to duty. It is the sign of *faith*. "'Tis conscience doth make cowards of us all." A man can hardly be courageous, in the true sense of the word, who has not a *principle* beneath his actions. Take some of the most glorious examples in history. There is hardly a nobler than that of Luther, appearing before the Emperor and the Princes of the Empire at Worms: a poor miner's son daring, in the name of God, to oppose the mightiest power in the world. But he does not stand alone. Knox, the Scottish Reformer, was harsh and uncompromising; but he was a man of heroic courage. But it is the same with all the truest and greatest. There is nothing really great in the man who is lacking in courage.

3. Pre-eminent among the greater qualities of character stands *justice* or *righteousness*. It is, if I may so speak, the practical, the active side of truth, and is inseparable from it. "The righteous man" is the grand character of Holy Scripture; and the Bible means by this word very much the same as we mean. It means the man who is guided by the principles of *truth and equity*.

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By justice we mean, first of all, devotion to duty. No man can be just who does not ask himself what God and man may rightly require at his hands. The neglect of duty is the robbery of humanity. It is depriving our fellow-men of that portion of work which we are morally bound to perform, not only for our own good, but for the good of others.

By justice we mean the doing to others as we would that they should do unto us. It means the steadfast purpose to wrong no one by thought, word, or deed —in person, in reputation, in possessions: it means the willingness, the eager readiness to repair, by every means in our power, any wrong which we may wittingly or unwittingly have done them.

4. And close beside it, almost as part of it, or as inseparably connected with it, stands *goodness* or *generosity*. We sometimes hear distinctions made between justice and mercy—righteousness and goodness; and there is a distinction in thought. Nay, there may be at times a distinction in action. We may concede, as an act of kindness, that which we do not acknowledge to be a duty on our side, or a right on the side of another. The Bible refers to such a distinction. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die," says S. Paul, "yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." We admit the distinction. Yet it may be doubted whether justice is ever found in men, unaccompanied by

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mercy, whether righteousness can live without goodness for its partner. A justice which knows no mercy is the height of injustice. A mercy which has no regard to justice is no true mercy.

There is no quality more noble, more beautiful than this of *generosity*. In the Latin language, the *Generosus* was the gentleman. He was the man who was broad, liberal, sympathetic, in thought, word, and deed. I am not sure that this is not the truest meaning of the word "gentleman" among ourselves. A gentleman is not a man who is dressed in the height of fashion, nor even a man whose education is respectable, and whose manners are inoffensive. We are perhaps too fond of saying of a man that "he is no gentleman"; but even then we very seldom refer to that which is merely external. We do not mean that he is badly or unfashionably dressed. We do not mean that he does not speak his mother tongue with perfect accuracy or with an irreproachable accent. We mean that there is something low, currish, ungenerous in the man. Yes, with us as with the old Latins, the *Generosus* is the gentleman.

What a splendid quality it is, generosity of thought, of word, and of deed! The quality which makes us think kindly of our fellow-men, when it is at all possible to do so; the quality which incites us to speak well of them, to praise rather than to blame, when

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our conscience will in any way suffer us to do so; the quality which bids us extend a helping hand to those who need it, and not to grudge the help which is asked; the quality which bids us assume as little as possible to ourselves, and concede as much as possible to others.

It is the finest feature in the most beautiful lives. It is the quality which, when we read of it coming forth in word and deed, makes our hearts glow and leap with joy. God be thanked, it is not absent from any part of human history: it has not been without examples in any department of human life.*

5. There is another element of character, on which something should be said, as it has not only a powerful influence on a man's own happiness, but also powerfully affects his attitude towards others. I mean *temperance;* and I use the word in its more comprehensive meaning. S. Paul, before Felix, reasoned not only of righteousness, but of temperance. The word means self-control, abstinence, continence; and indicates the restraint which should be placed upon the passions.

It is not necessary here to enter at large upon the subject.† The man who is under the dominion of passion must be a miserable man. In such a character there can hardly be anything really good and

* For many illustrations, consult Smiles on *Character*.

† The same subject comes up under various other heads.

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strong. To young men I would say, with all possible earnestness: Flee from intemperance and impurity in every form, if you do not wish to be slaves. These things are utterly ruinous to body and soul.

6. It is hardly necessary to add to these qualities the radical grace and virtue of *unselfishness*, for it is the root of all human goodness, as selfishness is the principle of all sin.

Selfishness is the parent of falsehood, cowardice, injustice, intemperance, and unkindness. That which we admire in all those great qualities which we have enumerated is the self-forgetfulness, the unselfishness which enters into them all. This is their very centre and support.

What is the most splendid quality of King David, the man after God's own heart? It was his generosity, his unselfish generous kindness, his forgetfulness of self. Look, for instance, at his behaviour to Saul, when that infatuated king was seeking his life. Even Saul himself could not help confessing: "Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil." The same character comes out in his refusal to drink the water of the well of Bethlehem, because men had gone "in jeopardy of their lives" to procure it.

III. But we must proceed to ask *how such a character is formed.* The *elements* out of which character of the best kind is formed are evidently these three:

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1. Our human nature as it comes into the world. 2. Divine grace bestowed upon us in Jesus Christ by the Holy Ghost. 3. The action of the human will. I am not concerned to deny that certain types of character of great beauty have been formed without conscious reference to the power of Divine grace. I am only saying here that, as far as we know, this is the true way, the best way, God's way, of forming and moulding and developing the new man after the image of the perfect Man, Christ Jesus our Lord.

1. There is *nature*.

This can never be ignored. If some have made too much of it, and have spoken as though a man must for ever be that which he is born, that the whole of his earthly discipline can only be the drawing out, the confirming, the solidifying of his natural tendencies, others have erred as much on the other side by ignoring the special nature possessed by every man at the first, and by treating the mind of a man as a blank upon which any inscription might indifferently be made.

The investigations of science within the last few years have done much to set this matter in its true light, and to show that the Pelagian doctrine and the theory of the sensational philosophy are as widely at variance with the facts of nature as with the teachings of theology. Men do not come into the world like a blank sheet of paper; their minds are far more like a

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sheet traced with sympathetic ink. There is nothing more clear than that men inherit not only physical powers, but moral qualities and tendencies from their forefathers; that not indeed character itself, but one great element of character, like other things, is transmitted from father to son.

It is quite necessary for us to take account of this element in considering the formation of character; it is equally necessary that we should assign to it no more than its just value. The natural constitution of a man's mind, its native dispositions and tendencies, will sometimes remain to the very end of his life unaltered and unmodified, or almost so, and will form his character. There are such cases, cases of men who are almost pure children of nature. It is clear that this is not the best way of forming character. It is equally clear that nature does not absolutely prescribe character, that a man need not be, by practice, exercise, habit, exactly the same kind of man that he is by nature. It may be that a certain colouring of the old man will always remain, in as far as that colouring is merely natural and innocent; and there is no reason why this should be regretted or striven against: it gives distinctiveness and individuality to the men and women of whom the world is made up. It is necessary, however, to guard against the notion that a man's natural tendencies must give an unalterable bias to his character

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through life. The very reverse has been proved multitudes of times, in human experience; and it is the very work of education and discipline, while it unfolds, develops, and strengthens the principles of truth and goodness which have been implanted in the soul, to eradicate those seeds of evil which either by nature may have existed in the soil, or which evil influences may have scattered there.

It would be easy to show, by examples, that a man's *nature* and a man's *character* may be two widely different things. The moral quality of the life entirely remoulds it, gives it a new tone, direction, capacity, power. We will only refer to the instances of Socrates and of Moses, of S. John and S. James and S. Peter. Nature, then, is an important element in human life and character; but it is not the whole. It is the basis of character; but it does not absolutely determine the superstructure. That is formed, (1) by *Grace* and (2) by *Action*.

2. The second element in character is *Divine Grace*. And by this we do not mean only that God is in fact the Giver of every good gift, and the Doer of every good thing. This is true; but it is not the whole truth. Man needs more than a religion of Deism, the mere revelation of a Supreme Being. Such a revelation would have comparatively slight influence over a man's mind and will, and would go but a very little way towards satisfying the desires

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of his heart, or affording the strength which he needs.

It is only by the redemption of Jesus Christ that the conscience of a man receives the satisfaction for which it craves, peace with God and the assurance of reconciliation. Without this rectification of the soul's relations to God there cannot be a foundation for harmony in a man's character.

So it is only by the grace of the Holy Ghost, received through the mediation and intercession of our Blessed Lord, that we can have in us that principle of life, which is the great controlling, moulding, harmonizing power in character. There is nothing which can raise us out of ourselves, but the power of God by the Holy Ghost; and, unless we are raised out of ourselves, we can become nothing good or great.

And the power in ourselves by which these gifts are embraced, and in which they are shown forth, is the power of *faith*. It is always the greatest power in human life, sometimes for good and sometimes for evil. It is faith that steels the warrior, so that he waxes valiant in the fight. It is faith that animates the statesman who keeps his eye upon the things not seen after which he is reaching, and strives to attain to the things hoped for. It is faith which nerves the sufferer on the bed of sickness patiently to endure unto the end, knowing that "all things work together for good." But it is faith in God alone, and

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in God reconciled to us through Jesus Christ our Lord, and coming to us by the Holy Ghost, which can be a principle of goodness, a principle, therefore, of truth and righteousness and love and harmony in our life.

Before leaving this point, we must say a few words on two great powers for good or evil, which largely influence the formation of men's characters. I refer to companions and books. A man is not only known by his friends; he is, in great measure, made by them. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed."* And what are books, but our most intimate companions? Sometimes the best; sometimes the worst. These are some of the most effective channels of influence, from above, or from below; and no thoughtful person will think lightly of them.

3. We mentioned a third element in the formation of character: *the acting of our own wills.* And I am using the word in the widest possible sense, as representing every product of the human will: thoughts (voluntary thoughts), words, deeds, prayers, sacred exercises of every kind, reading, study, and all conscious and voluntary intercourse with others. In the moral sense, all these are actions. Involuntary thoughts, sensations, and the like, are only states. We can only indirectly control these. We are only

* Prov. xiii. 20.

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indirectly responsible for them. They are rather the signs and the results of character than elements in its formation. But every voluntary act which comes from a man is not only the outcome of his character: it is also a distinct contribution towards its formation.

This is a matter of the deepest importance. It is the one point in which we are responsible for the formation of our character. Our nature, such as it is, was given us by God. We had nothing to do with it. God's grace is given to us freely; and only in as far as it is determined by our own actions have we any responsibility as to its possession or influence. But for what we do, for what comes by our own consent, out of our will, we are absolutely responsible. "The only things," says Epictetus, "which are really in our power are our actions." No one can doubt that our acts do, as a matter of fact, form our character. Here, again, a man's history is his character. In our acts, too, all those elements of which we have spoken are combined: our *nature*, for a man acts according to his nature; Divine *grace*, for by that alone we can do anything which is holy and good; our *will*, for out of that every action proceeds.

It is a point on which it is unnecessary to insist. Every one knows that his habits are the results of his actions. When we have done a thing a great many times, we have acquired the habit of doing it; and the sum of our habits is our character. From this we

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may see the importance of every word and deed, even the most minute—"every idle word that men shall speak," says our Lord, "they shall give account thereof"; and we actually do give account of every thought and word and deed in the moral result of our life.

It is clear, then, that *self-denial* must have a very important place in the formation of character; because it is the power of self-denial which determines the character of three-fourths of our actions. Whether a man shall do what he likes, or shall do his duty—whether a man shall act on a momentary impulse, or shall regulate his actions on a principle—this is the difference between a man who cannot or does not exercise self-denial and the man who can and does.

And this is the whole difference between a strong character and a weak. Self-denial in itself does not make a man good or bad. A man whose principles are utterly selfish and worldly may have great powers of self-denial. But although it does not constitute the difference between a good character and a bad, it does make all the difference between a strong character and a weak. The man who cannot or does not deny himself shows that he is weak already; but he is making himself ever weaker and weaker.

Do we need to be told what is here meant by self-denial? It means the steadfast acting on principle. It means the crossing of one's inclinations when they

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run counter to one's sense of right and duty, or, it may be, ultimate advantage. It means training and self-discipline, that self-discipline which makes a man endure hardness for the sake of some worthy object. It means living—not by mere chance, haphazard, impulse, but by rule. It enters into everything that a man does; it makes him regular and punctual, it makes him orderly and methodical, it makes him resist the temptation to sloth and dawdling and the waste of time and energy. It means the power of enduring contradiction, disappointment, pain. These are the principles on which, and on which alone, we can form, in ourselves or in others, a character which will stand us in stead when it is called upon to act, and which will be trusted by man and acceptable to God.

Now, let us remember that, as long as our life lasts, our character is being formed. It is perfectly true that the greater part of this work is done in our youth. I may say, a very considerable portion of it is done for us, or rather we do that most important part of the work of forming our character, under the influence of others. But it is a mistake to imagine that the formation of character terminates with our boyhood. It is indeed a matter of very great difficulty to eradicate qualities which have become confirmed in us by long habits, but it is quite certain that character is greatly modified in men after the period of youth; nay, that

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it is sometimes almost entirely changed, that it may greatly deteriorate, or, on the other hand, that it may become changed from evil to good.

The last is the rarest, because it is the most difficult, but it takes place.

It is no very uncommon thing, alas! to find a character debased by evil influences, even after a man has long passed the meridian of his life. Not a few examples are extant of men who, after having been a kind of second conscience to their fellow-men, have gradually or suddenly fallen under the dominion of evil, and lost all their power for good. Sometimes it has been the influence of a strong evil will to which a weaker nature has succumbed. Sometimes it has been brought about by a sudden change of circumstances, by some great joy or sorrow. It furnishes a solemn warning to us all. It says to us: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

But I wish particularly to insist upon the other side of this truth. A man may be changed, and men have been changed, from evil to good, from the world to God.

Thus, men have conquered a besetting sin; and that conquest has altered the whole complexion of their lives.

Men have adopted a new principle of life, have yielded themselves to God, and so have begun to live

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the life of grace and faith and devotion, instead of the life of nature, of worldliness and selfishness.

It has been done, and it may be done again. It is generally a very hard struggle, but it is not impossible, and it receives great and special help and blessings from God.

Finally, the importance of character will be felt when we remember that it is not formed for time only, but for eternity. There is no break in the continuity of a man's life and character. What is meant by this: "God will judge every man according to his works"? Does it mean that every act of a man's life will be enumerated, tested, pronounced upon? It is not likely. But, whether this be so or not, one thing is certain—that our works make our character, and our character will determine our position for ever. Every man will go to his own place. It is the law of man, of nature, of the universe: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Let us, therefore, examine ourselves, and see whether we are such as we should like to be when the fire of the Divine judgement shall try us, and the everlasting abode is prepared for us.

*** On the subject of this chapter I strongly recommend Mr. Smiles' work on *Character*.

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IV.

ON CONDUCT AND MANNER.

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IV.

ON CONDUCT AND MANNER.

THE subject which now comes on for consideration is that of conduct and manner; in one word, *Behaviour*. It is of less importance than that which was last considered, *Character;* as the outward is inferior to the inward. But its place is close to the other; and indeed it is as inseparable from it as the body is from the soul. "Behaviour," says Lord Bacon, "seemeth to me as a garment of the mind, and to have the conditions of a garment." The remark is full of suggestion in many ways, and reminds us that it is possible to think too much and too little of behaviour.

I. Now, first, with regard to the importance of conduct, behaviour, manner—I use three words rather than one, to prevent the subject being understood in any narrow sense—it is possible to exaggerate the value of manners, and on the other hand it is necessary to recognize the true importance of behaviour.

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1. It is possible that the French go too far when they say "The style is the man," (*Le style c'est l'homme*). If it be meant that the mere outward husk is the man, it is wrong. If it mean that our whole discipline is to be a kind of bodily drill, without regard to mental and moral discipline, it is not true. If it be meant that, on the whole, the man himself, the very inner nature and character of a man, comes out in his behaviour, taking that word in its widest application, it is substantially true.

We may say the same of the well-known motto of a great English bishop of the fifteenth century, William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester: "Manners maketh the man." Taken in the outward and shallow sense of the words, the saying is not true. Taken in the deeper and wider sense, it is exactly true. A man's actions do *make him* what he is, and they do *show* what he is. Habit, spirit, tone, tendency are all produced by a series of *acts*. By giving way to temptation men become the slaves of the principles to which they yield themselves up. By resisting temptation men become masters of themselves, and break the power of the passions and impulses under which other men succumb. By speaking words and doing deeds of truth, righteousness, and love, men become true and righteous and kind. In this sense manners do make the man; the devil and the world and the flesh make the bad man,

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the grace of God in Jesus Christ makes the good man; but it is a man's own acceptance of the devil as his master, it is a man's own acceptance of the grace of God, which makes the one or the other. This is one side, and a most important side, of the matter.

The other is only second in importance to the first: a man's behaviour not only makes him what he is; it *shows* what he is. I mean his whole behaviour, not a part of it, his conduct and manners at home and abroad; in the family, in business, in public life, in social intercourse; they must all be added together if you want to know the whole man; but so taken they reveal the whole man. As our poet says:

> "Manners are not idle, but the fruit
> Of noble nature and of loyal mind."

We might go further and say that slight things in manner and in conduct will often reveal the very principle of a man's life. You accidentally know of one or two acts of generosity performed by a man under peculiar circumstances, without any intention on his part of gaining publicity or any sort of notice from others; and you recognize the goodness of a soil which produced such flowers and fruit. Or, on the other hand, you have forced upon you some instance of great baseness, and you are constrained to see

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something utterly base in the character which produced it. It may not be the thing itself altogether, bad as it is; but you say the man who could do that would do anything that is bad, if he thought he had a sufficient inducement.

Let me give you an illustration: "At the battle of Dettingen* a squadron of French cavalry charged an English regiment; but when the young French officer who led them, and was about to attack the English leader, observed that he had only one arm, with which he held his bridle, the Frenchman saluted him courteously with his sword, and passed on." I do not repeat the story as bearing upon French manners. An English officer has never been reckoned wanting in magnanimity and generosity. I believe that English officers are the bravest and the gentlest in the world. But what I wish to point out is, that such an action was not the mere result of outward training. That would hardly have asserted itself at such a moment. An act so ready, so spontaneous, speaks for the heart of the man who performed it; it came out of a noble and generous disposition that scorned to take advantage of an unequal foe.

2. To these considerations on the importance of manner, I will add only one other: *manner is a power*, it is one of the greatest powers. Some men

* Smiles' *Character*, p. 147. Alison says it happened in the Peninsular War. I have no doubt Alison is right.

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(and perhaps more women) are irresistible. You cannot refuse to grant a request which they make, even when you have made up your mind to do so. Even when you cannot agree with their opinions, you have a wish to do so. On the other hand, there are men who will spoil the best of causes by their manner of advocating it. The moment you see them you have an instinctive desire to contradict them. Even when you agree with their opinions, you almost wish you could disagree with them.

There are few persons who have passed the meridian of life who could not give instances in which a man's success in life has been secured by his manners —in which it has been destroyed by the same means. I could easily recall instances which have come under my own observation.

I remember the case of a man who wanted another to assist him in a certain undertaking. It was a case in which there was need not only of probity and uprightness, but of a certain aptness for intercourse with others, a certain tact in the conduct of affairs. When inquiry was made respecting a person who was a candidate for the place, the testimony given was to the effect, that the man was a very good sort of man, quite truthful and upright, but that he was lacking in manner, was forward, self-asserting, wanting in tact and consideration for others; and that was enough!

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People who are very determined to have their own way, and to assert their own opinions, often wonder that they do not succeed, and put it down to the obstinacy and stupidity of their neighbours, to envy, jealousy, and what not. They ought in fact to put it down to their own want of manners. The very qualities which, they think, should achieve success, are an offence to others.

3. It is a subject which concerns us English people very nearly. It is said that, as a nation, we are not particularly well-mannered. The Prussians are probably worse than we are; but the French are better. These differences undoubtedly exist. The Irish, as a rule, have pleasanter manners than the Scotch, the Italians than the Germans, the French than the English. There must be something in these impressions. A recent writer in the great French review, speaking of our rule in India, says, "Les Anglais sont justes, mais ils ne sont pas bons." We are just, he says, but we are not nice.

It is said, in reply, that certain classes of French people are worse mannered than the same class of English; but I fear, this can only be regarded as the exception which proves the rule. The ill-mannered portion of a well-mannered people are sure to be the worst; just as an unmannerly woman is worse than an unmannerly man, because it comes more natural to a woman to be courteous than to a man.

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We have a way of getting rid of this accusation. We say that, with the French, it is all outside show. We call it French varnish, and so forth; and there is some truth in this. But it is not the whole truth. Where a whole people are distinguished in this way—on the one side or the other—there must be mental and moral qualities underneath, which account for the difference.

4. Even these slight remarks may show that manner is a *duty*, and not merely a matter of personal taste and choice. A good man has no *right* to make goodness repulsive. A good man will not do this unless there is something wrong about him. With some people there is a kind of ferocity of goodness; they carry in their faces an universal sentence of excommunication. They imagine that this spirit is fidelity, zeal, and the like. It is no such thing. It is, generally, selfishness, coarseness, bad temper. A man may be quite convinced of the truth of his principles; but he has no business to assume that others are not equally convinced. Nay more, he has no business (however good he may be, or may think himself) to assume that he alone has a right to decide as to the nature of truth and goodness, that other people do not possess, to the full, the same rights as himself. A man who believes that God has shown him what is true and good, will desire, from the very bottom of his heart, that other men may know and

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love that which he finds to be life and power to himself; but he will also be careful not to oppose needless obstacles in their way to the acceptance of his principles. I need not say another word to show that behaviour is a *duty*.

II. So far, we have been simply assuming that there is a difference between good manners and bad. We are now to say something on the subject of *good conduct, good manners, good behaviour*. And here a double caution is necessary. Although there are certain principles which must enter into the composition of what we call good manners, yet it is by no means necessary that every man should be formed after exactly the same pattern. To expect, to require that every man should have the same vivacity on the one hand, or the same solidity of manner on the other, would be to expect an absurdity. If anything is absolutely certain on this subject, it is that Almighty God has made us His creatures so diverse in temperament and natural disposition that we may each contribute something, and something different, to the general fund of human character and human enjoyment. The man who is naturally lively, cheerful, vivacious, does well to be so; the man who is naturally ponderous and solemn does equally well to be what he is evidently made to be. Imagine a slight, agile man assuming the deportment of a big, heavy, sombre man. Could anything be more

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ludicrous, except perhaps the naturally sombre man endeavouring to adopt the lightsome attitude and gestures of his mercurial neighbour?

But there is a caution on the other side no less necessary. A man may not, need not, must not, sink his own individuality. But this gives no sanction to the indulgence of personal eccentricity. There are people who imagine that eccentricity is a sign of genius. It is, indeed, sometimes a misfortune of genius; and in such a case may be condoned because of its accompaniments; but in most men it is simply a sign of weakness and folly, or even of conceit. It is an error into which young men are particularly apt to be misled. They read of some great man who had certain peculiarities: they fancy that they resemble him; and it is not so difficult to imitate his tricks as it is to follow the example of his greatness. It is a serious fault. Alexander the Great had a trick of bearing his head a little on one side; and his courtiers imitated the habit. They were not at all the nearer being great for that reason.

Most people have heard of a very eminent physician, Dr. Abernethy. His manners were peculiarly rough, at times almost brutal; and a good many of his own profession thought it a fine thing—a kind of following of the fashion—to be like him; but it was not long before the error was discovered. At this moment, if you were to select the class of men who are the most

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distinguished for the gentleness of their manners, you would probably find it impossible to discover one which would equal the medical profession.

So much for peculiarities of manner lawful and unlawful: we must now speak of the *conduct, manners, behaviour*, which, amid all allowable and desirable differences, must be recognized as good. And the word which most aptly describes what all men mean, when they speak of behaviour which they approve and admire, is the word *courtesy;* and this not merely the outward semblance of the thing, but the outward bearing as proceeding from an inward spirit. It must be sincere and genuine.

Keeping these two points in mind, that a man's behaviour should be courteous, and that it should be so not from an outward rule and constraint, but from an inward necessity, we shall have little difficulty in indicating the moral disposition of which such conduct should be the expression.

1. First, then, it is a fundamental principle that our conduct, our *behaviour must be sincere.* It must express what we think and feel.

I do not mean that every thought and feeling is to be revealed; but that, while a man may be silent when he could speak, and may check expressions of repugnance which he strongly feels, the words of kindness which he utters must be true words; the attention which he shows to another must proceed from affection, or at least from good-will.

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Believe me, it is not a mere outward polish that the world itself requires of us, nor merely a thin veneering of courteousness. Such a deportment will soon be discovered as a poor, shallow, unworthy thing, and be estimated at its true value.

2. For the same reason, a man's conduct must be, in the true sense of the word, *natural and unaffected.* People will say this is a mere matter of course, and a very simple thing. As a matter of fact, it is very much the reverse. It may seem a paradox; but it is quite true to say, that it is not natural for us to be natural. Children are natural; but there is a time when the manners of children are no longer suited for our larger growth, and we have to become natural in a different way. To some men—to a greater number of women—it is given to be natural throughout their whole life; but not to the majority. Perhaps some persons will be astonished if I say that old men are, as a rule, more natural than young men; but the more thoughtful observers of human life and conduct will confirm the truth of the assertion. The average young man, for instance, is not natural; he is either awkward or affected. It is only when his awkwardness is clipped and pruned and trained; it is only when his affectation is beaten out of him by an impatient world, or his own improved sense discerns its absurdity, that he becomes natural.

A man leaves his first nature behind him with his

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childhood: it is often a long time before he gains his second nature.

3. And this leads me to remark that in good behaviour there must be a *regard held to custom.*

It is easy to rail against conventionality; and if by conventionality be meant falseness, unreality, the mere parrot-like repetition of other people's words and ways, then let us denounce it in the name of God and man. It is an evil and a hurtful thing. But so much may be said without our denying, for one moment, the importance of custom and the necessity of following it. And this is a matter on which we are, in reality, all agreed, although we fancy that we are not, and find it convenient at times to forget it. The most unceremonious man, the most flagrant violator of conventional propriety, will be as much offended as the most ceremonious, if his own notions of propriety are crossed. Some of our habits which we recognize as good or harmless would be most offensive to the people of other countries. Some of their ways would be equally offensive to ourselves. No one who respects himself, no one who respects others, will lightly depart from the customs of the society in which he lives. You remember how S. Paul puts an end to a certain controversy, "We have no such custom, neither the churches of God." * A man or a woman who regards with disdain the

* 1 Cor. xi. 16.

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prevailing customs of his country, is, if possible, more foolish than one who is always in a state of alarm lest he or she should not have learnt the latest fashions and adopted them.

4. And this involves another point of good behaviour, I mean *self-control.*

In speaking of truth and sincerity of behaviour, I remarked that it did not involve the utterance of every passing thought, or even of every deep conviction. Perhaps there are few things which require so much taste as the hitting of the happy mean between liberty and restraint in this matter, in word or in deed. There are some men who never open their mouths on the subject of their fellow-men, or of the esteem in which they hold them. They blame no one; they are solemnly silent if others are found fault with. But then they are equally silent if others are praised. If they have no censure for another, neither do they ever utter a word of commendation. They are not the most interesting of men. As the French writer would say, they are not unjust; but they are not nice.

Yet the fault which lies in an opposite direction is the greater fault, the fault of those who not only utter every thought which arises in their mind, and usually such people's thoughts are of the least possible value, but think as recklessly as they speak.

There is, no doubt, a great charm in an open,

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frank, unconstrained manner. There is a great charm in an outspoken man. But this must have its limits. There is a certain reserve which is good, which is more than good, which is necessary, if men are to be endurable.

Now that which is here said of speech is equally true of action. That which is beautiful in the child is unseemly in the man; it is peculiarly unseemly in the woman. Let me add that the man or the woman who errs on the side of self-control errs on the safe side. What we call *abandon* needs the finest taste, to prevent its being objectionable and offensive. It is an obvious remark that it is easier to do nothing than to do something. A man may often repent having spoken; he may sometimes repent having been silent, but not so often.

5. But, once more, the great principle which regulates all behaviour by the surest rule, is *genuine kindliness of heart*, unselfish considerateness for others; that humble, kindly, gentle spirit, which is productive of a true, not a servile, deference and thoughtfulness towards the opinions, the feelings, and the interests of our neighbours and associates.

True kindliness is true courtesy. You cannot have genuine courtesy without it; you will hardly ever miss courtesy where you have it. This is a language which all understand: high and low, rich and poor, the most cultured and the most unlettered. I may

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add that the absence of all this, or the reverse of all this, is equally intelligible.

Let us try to understand what we mean by these general statements.

(1) We mean then, in the first place, that in the conduct of life, in our intercourse with our fellow-men, it should be one of our first thoughts *to do good to others* in every possible way, as far as we know how to do it, as far as we have the power and opportunity of doing it.

It is quite obvious that the universal prevalence of such a principle would speedily change the whole face of human society. There would be no anger, hatred, envy, suspicion, heart-burning: there would be peace, mutual confidence, mutual help everywhere. Then the intercourse of man with man would be most blessed and most lovely. It is, alas! equally evident that such a state of things is very far from universally prevailing. It is to be feared that there are very many of our fellow-men who have never distinctly seen that they ought to be guided by any such principle. It is to be feared that there are still more who, whether they have seen it as a duty or not, have never given serious thought to the carrying out of this principle in their life. Men are selfish—always thinking first of themselves, then, perhaps, and not always then, of their fellow-men; and if they do think of them, it is not with the view

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of giving them even a second place in their thoughts and affections; but in many, many cases simply with the intention of using them for their own purposes. May I not go further and say that there are few men, even of those who cherish the most affectionate thoughts towards their fellow-men and the most earnest desires to do them good, very few indeed, who have this thought always present to their minds in their intercourse with the world? This, however, is the first and deepest principle in all right behaviour, and, in proportion as we adopt it and seek to follow it, we may expect to achieve the only kind of success which is worth striving for.

(2) A second thought, and one closely connected with the first, will be the *desire to give all reasonable and lawful pleasure* to others, and *to spare them all needless pain*.

It would not be possible to carry out the intention of doing good to our fellow-men without carrying this thought also in our minds. It is perfectly true that pleasure may not always be good for us or for others. It is quite certain that pain and suffering may often prove real blessings; but it is not for us to determine what pain should be inflicted upon others. It is not for us to lay burdens upon the children of God. It is for Him to assign to each one of us that portion of grief, suffering, trouble, which He knows to be needful and beneficial for us. It is our duty to alleviate

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suffering, to lighten all burdens, to mitigate all pain to the best of our ability.

Can we truly say that this is kept in remembrance? Do men seek to spare each other pain and suffering as far as possible? Yes, there are many men who do so, there are many men who would not wilfully inflict pain upon a fellow-creature, who feel that, in wounding others, they are wounding themselves, who hardly ever speak a hard word, a word which to another seems unkind, but they are conscious of a hurt being inflicted upon themselves, and who carefully examine their consciences with reference to such conduct of their own, in order to ascertain whether it was necessary, whether it was the utterance of love and kindness, or of impatience and anger. But there are many others of whom nothing like this could be said.

(3) In carrying out this part of Christian conduct it is obviously necessary—it is indeed one main part of it—that we should have a *constant regard to the opinions, the feelings, the inclinations, and the interests* of others.

I am not advocating an entire surrender of a man's own independence; nor am I counselling a servile spirit which would be at once an injury to our conscience and a destruction of our personal dignity and self-respect; but I venture to assert that such a sacrifice will never be necessary, nay, will hardly be

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possible, where our consideration for others arises from affectionateness and kindliness of feeling. Servility proceeds from selfishness, not from love. It is engendered and fostered by the desire to gain our own ends rather than the desire to do good to others. He who acts from the higher and nobler motive will hardly ever be tempted to conduct so unworthy of his manhood, will be preserved from it by the principles of goodness and benevolence by which he is habitually influenced.

It is hardly too much to say that we are here touching upon the very distinction between a man whose conduct we admire and whose character we esteem, and a man whose conduct is offensive and repulsive. There are a good many of both kinds in the world, and we know how they are generally regarded.

The world is not always just; but, when we hear people complaining (or, it may be, proud to state) that they have no friends in a place in which they have lived for many years, we are apt to conclude that the reason is to be found in their neglect to cultivate the principles of ordinary good behaviour.

6. It is difficult to define more closely a subject which must always be, in its own nature, somewhat indefinite; but we might give an *illustration* of our meaning from the conduct of men in social intercourse—especially, I mean, with reference to the *use of speech*.

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In society we meet with many classes of men—talking men and silent men; and we meet with men who talk wisely and foolishly, kindly and unkindly; and also with men who are wisely and kindly silent and with those who are foolishly and unkindly silent.

To put the matter as concisely as possible—we meet with some men who monopolize the conversation. They must for ever be speaking and others only listening. It is obvious that such men do not fulfil the conditions which we have laid down.

Other men we meet who, without monopolizing the conversation, are dogmatic, self-opinionated, overbearing; who show by their tone and manner—if they do not say it in so many words—that they think no one has any right to hold opinions at variance with their own. It is unnecessary to characterize these people.

On the other hand, we meet with men who will sit silent in the midst of the most animated conversation, and never so much as open their lips; and this may be as great a fault in the other direction: *may* be, we say, not *must* or *need* be. A man may be silent from modesty, from diffidence, from a strong conviction that he can add nothing which will edify or interest his companions, or because he sees the ground well and fully occupied, and is quite contented that it should be so occupied. In such a case, doubtless,

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silence may be golden. But there are other kinds of silence—there is the silence which proceeds from mortification, because that particular person is not listened to with the deference which he expects. It is not very uncommon, and it is the reverse of lovely. There is the silence of absolute indifference — the silence of one who does not care to contribute anything to the entertainment of those in whose society he is found; and this is not pleasing.

It is said that Sir James Mackintosh was in this respect one of the most agreeable companions of all the men of his day. He was full of information and endowed with wit and wisdom. He could convey his thoughts with ease and grace; yet he never obtruded them. He was equally ready to speak and to be silent, to give and to take, to communicate and to receive; and his whole conversation and deportment were pervaded by such a genuine kindliness, that, whether he spoke or was silent, the beautiful spirit of the man was almost equally conspicuous.

It was the perfection of what we mean by manner or behaviour.

III. It is necessary that we should add a few words on the *teaching and the learning of right behaviour.*

On the teaching we need say little more than this, that the father, the mother, the instructor, who bears in mind the principles which have been set forth, and who has some sufficient knowledge and experience of

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the ways of the world, will not go greatly astray in this matter.

With regard to the learning of behaviour the case is more difficult. The moment you try to give rules on such a subject, you become aware of the difficulty, almost the impossibility. Those to whom such rules would be offered are already taught, well or badly, and perhaps have chiefly to unlearn what they have learnt.

Something, however, may be offered in the way of reasonable suggestion, even if we cannot lay down a code of rules.

1. First of all, it is clear that there can be no really good behaviour without goodness. Apart from this, all must be hollowness and insincerity. You cannot get good behaviour, good conduct, good manners—call it what you please—except from a good man. And when we say a good man, we mean a Christian man. If any one, therefore, asks me where he is to go to learn good behaviour, I say at once that *he must go to the school of Christ*. It is natural that a Christian minister should give this advice. It is natural that he should repeat his Master's words: "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly." But I go further than this. I believe, from my heart, that no one lives near to Christ, no one follows Him in "lowliness, patience, and charity" who will ever be really an ill-behaved

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man. He may be homely, he may be ignorant of many of the customs of what is called good society, he may not be what the world calls refined; but he will never be coarse, vulgar, offensive. I am aware that many people do not know of this basis of conduct, and that some will hardly be made to believe it; but I am sure it is true for all that.

2. Then, secondly, those who are in earnest on this subject will try to gain some knowledge—such knowledge, at least, as is necessary for their own purpose—of the customs and ways of those who are reckoned people of good behaviour.

This is very important. You will no doubt have met with people who would treat such advice with great contempt. They don't care for customs and conventional usages. They are a law to themselves, and act as they please, whatever other people may do or think. This is nonsense; because there is no human being who can carry out such a theory—or even endeavours to carry it out. The man who carries it out most fully will be the most offensive and intolerable of men.

Therefore I say to young people, with all sincerity and earnestness: Make yourselves acquainted with the customs of well-behaved people—of the most educated, the most refined, the most loveable of your fellow-men. Use your own discretion in lowliness and love, as to the measure in which you will adopt these

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customs; but at least make yourself acquainted with them. That will do you no harm—that will at any rate be a help and a guide to you, and sometimes in circumstances in which you would least expect it.

3. One other counsel may be given. It may be difficult to *learn good manners*, but it is not impossible to *correct bad manners*.

And here we may take an illustration from the art of public speaking.

If you go to a wise teacher of elocution, he will tell you at once what he can do, and what he cannot do. He will tell you, "I cannot certainly make you an orator. I cannot give you a voice if you have none. I cannot give you thought, feeling, power of expression. I cannot teach you free, simple, natural action. But I can help you to correct bad action. I can tell you what you ought *not* to do, and when I have taught you that, nature will teach you what you ought to do."

It is very much the same with manners and behaviour. It is hardly possible to give rules for manner without leading to extravagance and affectation. Dr. Johnson said that Lord Chesterfield's principles of politeness taught the manners of a dancing-master. I believe that dancing-masters have commonly very good manners; but we know what he meant. But although it is difficult to teach good manners, it is not nearly so difficult to correct bad behaviour; and

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every man who cares to do it may achieve considerable success in this way. And how?

(1) Make it a matter of conscience. When you feel that your behaviour has been incorrect or unpleasing, make a note of that kind of conduct as a thing to be condemned by yourself, to be guarded against and avoided in the future.

(2) Be willing to be taught by others. Take in good part the suggestions that are offered by your friends. You may *mean* very well, and yet not be fortunate in conveying your meaning. It is not enough to intend what is right; we are bound to consider the impression which we produce upon others. This we cannot possibly be sure of; but others can at least tell us what impression we have produced upon them.

(3) I go further: we may learn something from those who are not friends. The Latin proverb says, "It is well to be taught by an enemy." I grant that an enemy's judgement is hardly ever just. But, on the other hand, it generally has some small measure of truth in it; and we must be careful not to give occasion to those who seek occasion.

If your enemy says you are frivolous, he may be wrong; but the chances are that you have sometimes seemed frivolous. If your enemy says you are conceited, he is quite likely to be in error; but you probably had the appearance of it some time or other.

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If you are charged with selfishness, it may be a false accusation; but it is quite possible that you have not avoided the appearance of this evil.

And thus we come back to that principle which has so often been offered for our guidance, the principle of humility. The great Bacon has told us that the kingdom of knowledge can be entered only as the kingdom of heaven is entered, by our becoming as little children. It is the same with the region of behaviour. Here, as elsewhere, simplicity and godly sincerity will prevail when great abilities and many talents are of no avail.

It is the thought which I find meeting me at every turn of the road: we must go to the school of Christ. May we have grace to put ourselves under His wise and gracious and holy guidance! May we have patience, self-denial, love which shall enable us to learn of Him; and then we shall not go far astray either in the service which we render to God, or in the duties which we owe to men.

*** On certain points in this chapter I would refer to a very original and striking lecture, entitled, "Cakes, Leeks, Puddings, and Potatoes," by George Seton, Esq., Advocate. (Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas.)

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V.

ON DOING OUR OWN WORK IN THE WORLD.

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V.

ON DOING OUR OWN WORK IN THE WORLD.

A WRITER of great power and of wide-spread influence tells us that the great business of every man is to know his own proper work and to do it. "Know thyself," he says, "long enough has that poor 'self' of thine tormented thee; know what thou canst work at; and work at it like a Hercules! That will be thy better plan." *

I am not inclined to enforce an exhortation so sweeping and trenchant without qualification. It may be doubted whether a man can judge rightly of his work without knowing something of himself; and, at any rate, these two branches of knowledge will always more or less go together.

But, as far as regards the positive part of the advice, it is undoubtedly true and good. It is our great business in life to find out what work Almighty God has appointed for us to do during the short portion of time which is assigned to us here, and to set about it,

* Mr. Carlyle, *Past and Present.*

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and do it with our whole might. And I may add that whatever place we may assign to the "heaven descended *know thyself*," this is very certain, that the very best possible means of knowing ourselves will be the vigorous and earnest doing of our own work.

I. *Work*, then, let me say at once, *is to be regarded as the bounden duty of every human being*, of every one born into this world, who has the power to work.

It is greatly to be feared that very false notions on this subject are prevalent among all classes. The poor man is tempted to look upon his daily labour as a mere hardship and curse, not seeing how it commonly fares with those of his class who are suddenly relieved from the necessity of work, and who are seldom made happier or better by the change. Men born in the higher ranks of society, who have been accustomed to see around them, among their own friends and acquaintances, multitudes of persons who seem to have no obvious duties to perform, not unnaturally come to look upon labour as a thing unsuited to their station, and so to regard the necessity for it as a misfortune, or even a disgrace. In fact, it is one of their great grievances that the country will no longer tolerate those sinecure offices in which they might have obtained a gentlemanlike provision for life without submitting to the necessity of doing anything for it.

All this is sad folly. It is a resisting of the laws

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and will of God: it is an ignoring of the true nature and intention of human life, as well as of the true basis of human happiness.

Work is the law of the universe. Almighty God, the Supreme Lord of the universe, does not exempt Himself from this law. The sublime words of our Lord Jesus Christ declare to us that He and His Father are workers: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work."

In this respect, too, we are made in the image of God. He has given us powers of thought and feeling; but He has also given us powers of will and action. To be idle would be to allow some of our powers to lie unused, would therefore be to go against the Divine purpose as revealed in the constitution of our nature. Nor did the Maker of all leave mankind to discover their duty to the world in which they live, to infer it from their knowledge of the powers with which they were endowed. He placed our first parents in the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. Labour was not a penalty inflicted upon man sinful and fallen; it was a duty required of man innocent and unfallen; nay more, it was to him, in God's purpose and in fact, a blessing and a means of blessing.

When man had sinned, then the earth was cursed and labour became toil; but this too was ordained for man's sake, and as a means of good to him. It may be that, through our personal sins and our social sins,

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the burden has often become so heavy as to be crushing. It may be that it has been made to some more of a curse than a blessing. But even as the world now exists, and as men are found employed in the world, idleness is an endless misfortune and evil to men, and work a blessing.

It is labour which brings our powers to perfection. They would otherwise lie feeble, undeveloped, and useless within us, as indeed many men's highest capacities, and lowest too for that matter, do now lie. Labour is a source of happiness to men, for only in activity can there be real enjoyment. And even the happiness which is found in rest and relaxation derives its real charm and power from its being the unbending of the bow which has been kept on the stretch—the relief to energies which have been perhaps painfully taxed.

Besides, the world has need of our work; and if our work be needed, and God has made us to be workers, then it is a duty for every one of us to set about it; it is a sin and a robbery of God and our fellow-men to neglect it. In short there can be no truth, no honour, and no happiness in the life which fails to recognize this clear and imperative duty.

"Two men," says Mr. Carlyle,* "I honour and no third. First, the toilworn craftsman that with

* *Sartor Resartus*, Bk. iii., c. 4. *Cf.* Mr. Girdlestone's lecture on *Society Classified*, p. 4.

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earth-made implement laboriously conquers the earth, and makes her man's . . . . Toil on, toil on; *thou* art in thy duty, be out of it who may; thou toilest for the altogether indispensable, for daily bread.

"A second man I honour and still more highly: him who is seen toiling for the spiritually indispensable; not daily bread, but the bread of life. Is not he, too, in his duty? . . . . These two, in all their degrees, I honour: all else is chaff and dust, which let the wind blow whither it listeth."

II. *To each one of us God has assigned some special work.* This principle is most clearly set forth by precept and example in Holy Scripture; and if nature and history are true revelations of the mind of God—to deny which would be practical atheism—then the same principle is no less clearly revealed by the actual needs of men and the history of human progress.

It is assumed in Scripture that there is something for our hands to do, and for our head as well; for, to apply a popular saying, the head must not only guide the hands, but it must and can often "save the hands." That which our hands find to do, we are to do with our might.

In the early childhood of the human race there was very little of what we call the division of labour. A man had to do almost everything for himself, instead of doing much for others, and having much done by

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others for himself. Yet a certain division of labour was found convenient, as soon as our first parents had children to whom any work could be allotted. To the eldest son was given his father's business of cultivating the soil. "Cain was a tiller of the ground." The farmer must always be our first need: the most ancient and the most necessary of workers. The second son was appointed to take care of the flocks belonging to the first family. "Abel was a keeper of sheep." It was man's second need.

If not an absolute necessity, it was a manifest convenience, that their spheres of labour should be divided. If both had been equally farmers and shepherds, both the tilling of the ground and the keeping of the flocks must have been worse done. In this early example of human life we have the principle of the division of labour. "When men began to multiply on the face of the earth," it became more and more apparent that they could best promote their own well-being and the interest of others by taking some particular portion of the common work which was needful for the support of the race to which they belonged. It is unnecessary to point out how this division of labour has gone on, especially in more recent times, until it has extended not only to every employment, but to the minutest parts of every employment and kind of work.

It has, therefore, long been obvious that, if a man

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is to be of any great use to himself and the world, he must devote himself to some particular calling and make himself, as far as he can, skilled in some particular work. There are very few "Admirable Crichtons" in the world. A man who attempts to do everything, will generally do nothing well. There can be no doubt that some very considerable men, who might have done good and useful work for their race, have failed to do anything of great or enduring value, simply because they lacked the concentration of mind and energy without which such work was impossible.

I am not of course advocating a mere narrow culture which can have no sympathy with other men or their doings. There is perhaps no creature on earth more wearisome and trying than the man who can never, for one moment, forget his own business, or look at any other employment except in the light of his own. Yet, on the other hand, we can hardly withhold our admiration from those who make all their thoughts bend to their own special calling or work, even when they carry the tendency to excess. "This one thing I do" is a grand motto for the worker: grandest of all, however, when he means by it not the neglect of the thoughts and purposes which are moving in the minds of other men, but the subordination of all to the main object and endeavour of his own life.

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It may be that our work has no ambitious character or splendid appearance which will dazzle the eyes of men and attract their admiration. It may be the simplest, the most obscure; and yet it may, for all that, be the most useful and therefore the most dignified. Let young men and women lay this thought to heart: it is given to few of us to do any kind of work that will make us a name in the world: it is generally wrong for us to desire such a name or the work that would gain it; it is the fulfilment of *duty* alone that can bring us true honour; and all fame or glory which comes to us in any other way is false and hollow.

Many of us have now long chosen our life's work, wisely or unwisely, and have been doing it for many years, well or ill; and it is seldom wise for a man to change his profession. But there are others who have not yet made this choice; and it may be useful for them to have some suggestions offered to them on this subject.

1. A first obvious and fundamental principle is this, that our work should be *lawful* work, that it should not be contrary to the law of God. And this is a consideration which not only concerns the Christian, but which should weigh with every man who wishes to achieve the most ordinary success. A bad life, and bad work, apart from its unlawfulness, will hardly ever prosper; in the true sense of the word, will never prosper.

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2. Then, as a second rule, and one which is closely connected with the first, we may lay it down, that our work should be *useful* to ourselves and others. There are some who tell us (like Lamartine,* for example), "that it is a matter of little consequence *what sort* of work we are engaged in," provided we really labour.

There is this amount of truth in the saying, that a man who really works will soon find out whether he is doing well or ill, right or wrong. The laws of nature and of society will soon open his eyes on that point. It is therefore undoubtedly better for a man, unless he be a positively bad and evil-meaning man, to get to work upon something or other, than to remain idle. Nor would we wish to encourage a nervous scrupulousness, which sees evil and mischief in everything; and which is so afflicted by doubts and fears about the lawfulness of the most common and necessary employments of human life, that it can hardly enter upon them without a sense of guilt.

But if over-scrupulousness be an evil, unscrupulousness is a sin. We have no right to do work which is unnecessary, when we know that it must be injurious to ourselves or others. And we have many aids to a knowledge of that which is, in this respect, good or bad. We have our conscience, we have our Bible, we have the conscience of the society in which we live; and I cannot help thinking that while we

* See Mr. Girdlestone's lecture on *Our Misdirected Labour*, p. 5.

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pay respect to these guides, we are little likely to err in our choice.

3. Then, further, a man should have regard to his *qualifications* and endowments, and even to his personal *inclinations*, in deciding upon a course which may bring usefulness and happiness or misery and hurt to himself and others. And the consideration of his fitness increases in importance, the more weighty and influential is the profession which he intends to adopt. I may say, with all truth and earnestness, that, if a man is capable of shame, if a man is capable of being overwhelmed by the sense of utter failure, it will be well for him to consider seriously, when undertaking any work of great importance for himself or others, whether he has any of the qualifications necessary for its performance.

4. One other consideration should not be overlooked. I mean the *actual circumstances of our life*, or to put it in another and better form, *the leading of God's providence*. In the vast majority of cases, this is by far the safest guide; in many cases it is the only guide. There are multitudes of human beings who, without having any special fitness for any peculiar work, will do almost any ordinary work fairly well, if they can be got to see that it is their duty, and will only give their minds to it.

In such cases, and they are by far the most numerous, I would say to a man, "Do what you are set to

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do, and do it as well as you possibly can, and your life will be honourable and even truly dignified."

People often fancy that, because they have not done their work decently, they have therefore mistaken their calling. They would have done well, they think, in some other position. Most of us, perhaps, are sometimes tempted to imagine that we might have excelled in some work which we were never allowed to attempt.

Doubtless, there are such cases. Mr. Carlyle laments that the world could find no better work for the poet Burns than setting him to gauge ale-barrels. Scattered through the sorrowful history of the human family there are occasional examples of men who have been what we should call utterly thrown away.

But these cases are exceptional. A man who does one thing badly is likely to do many things badly. A man who does one thing well would probably have done many things well, if he had had them to do. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do," the work which is actually put into thy hand, as a necessity for thyself and others, "do it with thy might."

So much on the choice of work.

III. *Let us now speak of the doing of it.*

1. Now there is one consideration which is very simple, very obvious, and yet which is very frequently overlooked, which I must not pass by. It is this, that *what is worth a man's doing at all is worth doing well.* It is a very obvious truth; yet it is constantly

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overlooked; it is even contradicted. You may hear people, any day of your life, justifying their neglect or carelessness by the remark that the thing they are doing is of no importance, forgetting that everything is of importance. Such a defence is hardly ever valid. What should we say if a man who was employed to make some small nail or screw for an engine were to do his work carelessly on the ground that he had not been employed to perform work which he regarded as more important. The faultiness of that screw may be the destruction of the engine, may occasion the loss of much precious human life. Now the world in which we live may be compared to that engine, and no one can tell how the slightest carelessness in matters of apparently small importance may, in the course of human events, lead to the greatest calamities.

Or again, there are parts of the human body which seem to sustain no very vital relation to the whole constitution, and yet the slightest injury to one of those parts, if neglected or treated lightly, may be, and has often been, the cause of death. This is a far better illustration. Society is not a dead machine, but a living organism; and everything which belongs to it, however insignificant it may appear, may have the greatest influence on the well-being of men, of society, of the world at large.

Make up your mind, therefore, as to what your work in life shall be. Decide for yourself, if you

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please, and are able so to decide, what portion of a particular work you can undertake, and what is *your* best mode of doing it; for all these considerations are lawful, and sometimes necessary; but, having so considered and decided, remember that this is your work, and it is your business to do it as well as you can.

2. And think, too, what a splendid thing good work is, of whatever kind it may be, hand work or head work, the work of the chisel, the graving tool, the pencil, the brush, the pen, what *an incentive the thought of doing it well is to the true worker!* what *a delight to the man who sees his work!*

This thought, I say, is the *most powerful incentive to the true workman.* It is the highest and the last by which earnest men are influenced, and is involved in the thought of doing all for the glory of God, and to please Him.

In childhood, our first thought, apart from our own gratification, is to please our parents, our friends, our neighbours. It is a motive which is, in itself, excellent and commendable, and which, with the better kind of men and women, never leaves us. We meet with this thought in most workers; and it is embalmed in the writings of the greatest of men. It speaks most touchingly and impressively in the preface to the great Dictionary of Johnson: "I may surely," he says, "be contented without the praise of perfection,

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which, if I could obtain, in this gloom of solitude, what would it avail me? I have protracted my work till most of those whom I wished to please have sunk into the grave, and success and miscarriage are empty sounds."

In youth, we are possessed by the spirit of emulation; and it would be wrong entirely to discourage this sentiment; but it is one which does not live with the best men. "As we grow older," it has been well said, and the speaker * might have added, as we grow wiser, "we care less to surpass others, and more to do our own work well." It is a saying which is verified in the experience of most men who have ever recognised the seriousness of life, and of their own place in the world; of most men who have ever set themselves with any earnestness to fulfil the work to which they were appointed by God or by man.

What can afford a truer or a deeper pleasure to the true workman than to see his work taking shape under his observant eye, under his careful and laborious hand? What but the satisfaction which he experiences when he finds that he has not wholly failed in his attempt, that he has come somewhat near to the ideal which he set before himself when he began?

And good work is not only a joy to the worker: it is also, if not equally, *a delight and a benefit to all*

* Lord Derby, at Edinburgh.

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who behold it. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever," says one of our poets; and the words are emphatically true of a thing of beauty which is the result of human labour. The statues of ancient Greece are to this day, and will be through all ages, the delight of the world and the instructors of the artist. The pictures of mediæval Italy grow more precious every year as their transcendent beauty is more fully and widely recognised. But the statement has manifold applications, and it applies to objects of less lofty character and aims. The tools which we use every day in the ordinary occupations of life, the objects which lie around us in our home, are sources of constant annoyance or satisfaction to us. Their makers and framers, known or unknown, are earning, it may be after they have long ceased to work on earth, our gratitude or our censure. We are dwelling upon their work with dissatisfaction or delight.

And if the work itself afford so much pleasure to others, no less does the very doing of it afford gratification to the beholder. Who has not looked with pain upon a bungler at work? Who has not watched with delight a skilled workman? And this difference enters into every department of human occupation and effort. Men stand aside when they are in the presence of a master-mind: they instinctively surrender their tools into a master-hand. It is said of a certain body of commissioners who have discharged

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most important functions in this country that they never thought of beginning work, they only sat nibbing their pens until a certain member of their body arrived. They felt that they were as likely to go wrong as to go right in his absence, that anything which they did before he arrived was likely to be revised or altered when he came.

A story is told of the two great commanders in the French war of the *Fronde*, which illustrates this point in a striking manner. Turenne, the greatest general of his time, was at the head of the royal army. Condé, who was second to him alone, had been absent from the rebel army which at that time he commanded. After a brief suspension of hostilities, the rebels changed their position and made an attack upon the forces of the king. When Turenne saw the manner of the attack, he exclaimed: "Ah, Condé is there." The man, who was himself master of his art, saw, in the skilful movements of the enemy, the presence of a master's hand.

And so it is always. To those who have eyes to see, there is no difficulty in discerning the true workman in his work.

3. Now, what I want to say with peculiar emphasis is this, that such excellence can be attained only by *doing what our hand finds to do with our might.* In order to be good and skilled workmen we must first work hard, with care, earnestness, perseverance; and

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he who does thus work will seldom fail to become a workman.

I do not mean to say that good work cannot often be done with ease. The best work is often accomplished with the greatest apparent ease. But it is so done, because the doer of it has spared no pains in learning his art.

People make the greatest mistakes on this subject. They imagine, on the one hand, that skill is the result of genius, which does not need to labour, and on the other hand, that no amount of labour will enable them to do a thing really well.

I do not, of course, mean to deny that there are great natural differences between one man and another. Such differences are too obvious to need that we should dwell upon them. But, we must still assert, without ignoring the difference of natural endowments, that no man ever yet attained to excellence and distinction without giving his mind and his heart and his hand, his very best energies in short, to the work which he had undertaken. Genius itself has been defined as "a transcendent capacity for taking trouble." And there is a unanimous consent on this subject on the part of all the greatest and most successful workers that the world has ever known.

Plato quotes with approval the saying of Hesiod, "The gods have set sweat before virtue." True nobility can be attained, he says, only through toil.

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Virgil tells us that the great Father of agriculture, the Supreme Being, has not willed that the way should be easy for His workmen: "*Pater ipse colendi Haud facilum esse viam voluit.*"

Goethe, who is said to have produced the best German prose ever written, testified that "no line ever came to him in his sleep"; and you may ask any man in the world who has attained to excellence in any department of human life, whether he has reached the goal otherwise than by toil.

It is equally true that real earnest labour hardly ever fails to ensure a certain amount of skill and capability in the work upon which it is bestowed. The path is sometimes very long and very weary; but it is never patiently trodden without leading to some measure of success. History is full of examples of men who surmounted the greatest difficulties in the way to excellence. The name of Demosthenes occurs to every mind. He was perhaps the greatest orator that the world has ever seen. He was, by reason of this gift, the ruling power in Athens and in Greece, during a great part of his public life. And to this power he attained, in spite of great natural defects, by the sheer force of unwearying toil and indomitable perseverance.

But we need not go back to the history of ancient Greece for confirmation of this statement. Every history tells us of the successful pursuit of knowledge

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under all kinds of difficulties; and few men need travel beyond their own experience. In our own school life, and in the knowledge which we have had of our contemporaries in the business of the world, we can hardly fail to recall the names of some men of very slender abilities who have succeeded by dint of persevering effort, and others who were full of power and promise in their youth, who have suffered their energies to be frittered away and paralysed by sloth and indifference.

4. Do you ask what *we mean by this doing* what our *hand finds to do with our might?* It is not easy to give a definite and particular answer that would in all respects be satisfactory, or, indeed, of much practical use. Every man who has the instinct of work within him, nay, every man who is willing to work in deed and in truth, will naturally find it out for himself. Go and work, and you will learn what work is, and how you may best do it. You will learn to work as children learn to walk. Yet one or two hints may be offered which may serve as guides to those who need and seek guidance.

(1) And the first requisite is *attention*. On this point so much has already been said that I refrain from dwelling upon it. Suffice it to say, that there is no characteristic which more distinguishes one man from another. It is the stretching or bending of the mind to the object which is set before it. It is the

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concentration of thought and energy upon the work which has to be done; and no man who cannot, in this point, conquer himself, can ever hope to attain to excellence or achieve success.

(2) A second piece of advice which can hardly be omitted is this: *do your work in a methodical, orderly manner.*

There are some men who catch up a subject anywhere, and go on in any kind of order or disorder. This accounts for a great deal of the loose thinking with which the world is afflicted. It starts from no distinct premises. It refers to no recognized principles. It is tossed to and fro by its own incoherency. It is filled with contradictions which are mutually destructive. It leads to indefinite results. It produces no strong convictions.

It is the same with men's work. It is done with no method; it is carried on with no sort of order, and consequently it is marked by no real progress. It is a simple fact of history that nothing of any value has ever been accomplished in this manner. Men who are afflicted with the delusion that they are great men, or that they must turn out to be great men—the most melancholy delusion, perhaps, which can overtake a man—are often tempted to imagine that disorderliness and want of method are signs of greatness. "It is your little men"—so they reason with themselves—"who are neat, orderly, methodical:

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a great mind cannot descend to such trifles." And they are not little men, and cannot adopt the ways of such. As though your Alexanders, your Cæsars, your Fredericks, your Napoleons, your Wellingtons, had thus built up their military genius, had thus gained their splendid victories! Follow the history of their lives, and you will see how great, how ludicrous is the error. What was the mighty power which they wielded for the most part, but the power of order? Did they gain their battles by bringing up cavalry, infantry, artillery at hap-hazard? Would it not be more true to say that their genius consisted in seeing at a glance the right place for every arm of the power which they wielded? Was there not in their minds a rigorous necessity for every division and every regiment to occupy the ground on which they commanded that it should stand? But it is the same everywhere and in everything. You may not have this gift by nature, but you can learn it; and he who has not mastered or who will not master himself and his circumstances, so as to learn it and practice it, has not taken the first step towards success, whatever be the enterprise which he has in hand.

(3) One other point should be noticed: the necessity of *attention to the least things, as well as to the greatest.*

It is a common error, and it is especially the error of little minds, to pay attention to things which seem

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to us to be great, and give little heed to those which seem small. The error is a very natural one. But it is, in all respects, most grievous. Sometimes, indeed, the neglect of the smallest points will bring ruin upon a whole undertaking. One of the later battles* of Frederick the Great was lost because he did not know the nature of the ground in one particular place. All his arrangements were made with skill, and carried out with decision; but that one mistake marred his plans.

And further, the man who has not learnt to do little things well, will probably do nothing well. He who is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much. The man who does the least thing which it is his duty to do with earnestness and care, will be likely to do the greatest things with energy and success. And it is by doing well, in early days, those little things which it comes to us to do, that we gain the knowledge and ability, in after life, to do those greater duties which are then entrusted to us.

We have spoken of work as the business of life; and we have assumed that it will often take the form of toil. It will often be painful and wearisome. Work, I believe, will never cease, even in heaven; but it will not always be toilsome. And this will not be unintelligible to us when we reflect how easy work becomes in the course of time to a skilled hand. Our

* The Battle of Kunersdorf.

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physical organization grows weary, but we do not weary of our work; and so, when the regenerated body is no longer subject to the law of change and decay under which it is placed in this world, toil will be unknown, and labour will be sweetest rest.

Surely this thought may form one among many incentives to labour here. This is a time of learning and training; and as we use it well or ill, so will our future state of peace and happiness be. To those who have "laboured and not fainted" will be addressed the glorious approval, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"—surely the highest which even the lips of Christ Himself could speak. May it be testified in the judgement that cannot err, of many a one who reads these lines, that he has been "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed."

*** On the subject of this chapter, consult Mr. Smiles' *Self-Help*, also the valuable lectures of Mr. Girdlestone referred to (Robins, Weston-super-Mare). Quite recently an excellent lecture on the Christian view of work has been published by Dr. Uhlhorn, of Bremen. (*Die Arbeit im Lichte des Evangeliums betrachtet.*)

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VI.

ON DOING ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

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VI.

ON DOING ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

THE subjects with which we have been dealing are of infinite importance to every human being. They may be said to underlie all other subjects, and to connect themselves with the whole of a man's thoughts, principles, life, activity. Only as men think, reflect, work, are they worthy of the name of men. Thought without action is unreal and worthless, is sure at last to become wrong thinking, morbid thinking. Action without thought is equally worthless, and is very likely to become mischievous, sometimes the more mischievous the more it is intended to be useful and beneficent.

In considering the various subjects which have come under our notice, we have not overlooked the religious motives by which men should be actuated, or the guidance, in precept and example, which we have received from the revelation of Jesus Christ. But we must now deal with this aspect of the matter formally and directly. We are now to speak of one

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consideration which ought to enter into all that we undertake and accomplish, the glory of God as our chief end and most powerful motive in all that we do.

I. And first of all, I may take it as a thing which is undeniable and generally conceded, that, *if there be a God, His place in our life must be supreme*, and *His rights over us universal.*

1. *If there be a God?* Let us dwell on those words for a moment. A vast number of our duties would be very much the same, even if there were no God. A man who makes himself thoroughly acquainted with the laws of nature and the history of mankind, will agree that we could hardly have a better rule of life than to do as Christ bids us. That was the final judgement of Mr. J. S. Mill. It is better for men individually, and for society at large, that they should so live as though they must one day give an account to God. This is a point which deserves consideration. At present, however, we simply note it and pass on.

2. Most men are quite convinced that there is a God. You may hear them speak as though it were an open question, as though they were not at all sure of it. Nay more, multitudes of men live very much as though there were no God. But come to close quarters with them, and you find that there are really but few who do not either hope or fear that

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there is a Supreme Being. All history serves to show that it is impossible to eradicate this idea from the heart of man. There never has been a race above the mere savage which has not had the idea. Some doubt whether any people has ever existed without it. If anything beyond food and shelter can be said to be a necessity to mankind, God may be so considered. The longer we consider the subject, the more we shall agree with Voltaire: "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent Him."

3. Now it is quite clear that, if there is a God, His *place in our life must be supreme.* If there is a God; not merely a blind force baptized, for decency's sake, with that name; but a self-conscious, intelligent, voluntary Being, the Creator, Preserver, Sustainer of the universe: then we, being His creatures, entirely dependent upon Him, and finally responsible to Him for all our actions freely performed, must have a relation to Him, which, so to speak, transcends and absorbs every other relation. His place in our life, as we have said, must be supreme: His claims over us universal. In short, there can be no thought of our hearts, no word of our mouth, no action of our will, which ought not to be determined by His will and referred to His judgement. Will this be denied by any sane and thoughtful person? If this be not so, what do you mean, when you use this awful word, God? Has He not—must He not have—a right to

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command, a right based not only on His creative power but on His perfect righteousness and goodness? Has He not the power to enforce His rights, and to punish those who ignore or resist His will? If men will set themselves in opposition to Him, must it not be "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"?

Now, the moment we apply these undoubted principles to the actual experience of life, we become aware of a *double error:* the error of religious people who divide their life into two portions, making the one part religious, with which Almighty God has to do, and the other part secular with which He is supposed to have nothing to do; and on the other hand, the error of those who are not religious, who say that life is altogether secular, that there is no God; or else, that He does not concern Himself with our affairs.

If religious people commit the first error, we cannot wonder that many draw the inference that there need be no religion. And the error has been common in all ages. It is not difficult to understand its origin; but, however this may be, the fact is plain enough. This belongs to God, men say, and must be carefully guarded for Him: that belongs to the world, and religion has nothing to do with it. What is the inference? One which is very serious, but not very unnatural. An earnest man who really discerns the

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seriousness of human life, and even its sacredness, is told that ordinary actions and engagements are secular and not sacred; and he says (and we think that he is right in saying it), if this be not sacred, then nothing is sacred. If duty be not sacred, if the thoughts of my heart, if the deeds which make up the great sum of my life be not sacred, then nothing can be sacred; for I myself must be a profane thing. His inference would be just, if his starting point could be conceded. But it cannot be conceded by those who believe in a God: least of all can it be conceded by those who believe that God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ our Lord. In man's life, in God's world, there is nothing profane, there is nothing which is common or unclean. The Bible is full of the principle that all belongs to God and must be consecrated to Him: "every idle word," the "cup of cold water"—"whether ye eat or drink or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

II. Clear as this principle may be, the statement of it is at once met by the very natural question: *How can creatures like ourselves add to the glory of God?* If there be one idea which is absolutely inseparable from the thought of God, it is that He, and He alone, is altogether and absolutely sufficient for Himself. He has no need of man, or of anything that man can offer to Him. It is equally evident that man has nothing that he can bestow upon

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his Maker; for what have we that we have not received?

Nay, we may go further: we may affirm, without hesitation, that God Himself can add nothing to His own essential glory. He never has added to it; for it is essential and eternal; and as He is perfect and infinite, so it is susceptible of no increase. In all His past manifestations—in all the mighty works which He has wrought—He has revealed, but He has not increased, His glory. When the Egyptians lay dead upon the sea-shore, and Moses and Miriam sang the praises of Him who had overthrown the horse and his rider, and brought His own people out in safety; when Solomon dedicated the holy and beautiful house which he had builded for the God of Israel;—nay, we go further—when the eternal Word of God was manifested in the flesh, full of grace and truth, even then nothing was added to the glory of God; nor will be, when the end shall come, and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ.

But, although God cannot increase His glory, He can reveal it to His creatures; and this has been the object of all the disclosures which He has made of Himself in the past history of mankind. In nature, in providence, in His dealings with His people, in the revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, God has been declaring to us His creatures, His irresistible power,

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His absolute righteousness, His infinite love and goodness.

And in carrying on this work of self-manifestation, He has not refused to associate His creatures with Himself. The moment therefore that we acknowledge His truth and righteousness and goodness, we do in this sense give glory to Him. The moment we do in our own lives manifest a regard to His will, give evidence that the thoughts and purposes of God are the principles of our life, the moment we devote ourselves to the carrying out of His designs on behalf of the world which He has created, that moment we are doing our part towards glorifying Him. "Ye are the light of the world," says Christ. He who claimed this title for Himself did not refuse it to those who shone by a light which was reflected upon them from Him; and He adds, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

III. *How, then, shall we give effect to this principle?*

One thing, at least, appears to be quite certain, that there can be no real neutrality, that those who believe in God must, throughout their life, be honouring Him or dishonouring Him. We must either be doing all to the glory of God, or else be doing what we can to cross His purposes and defeat His designs with reference to ourselves and others. And surely

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we may add to this remark another which is equally certain, that every one who believes in God as a living Presence in this world, would desire to be found on His side, doing His will, furthering His designs, in short, doing all to His glory.

Now, if I am asked *how a man can set about this work,* I can have no hesitation in answering this question. I know of no other way than *by becoming a Christian,* by living as a Christian, by doing what S. Paul calls "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things."* You may say that I am bound to give this judgement. And in a certain sense so I am. A Christian minister who did not give this answer would not only be a despicable object to others, but to himself.

But you may say that you are under no such obligation either to give this answer or to accept it. Without discussing that question, I may at least venture to ask *what other answer you have to give*—what other "philosophy of life" you are ready to propose? Observe, we are not now dealing with the atheistic hypothesis, but with the theistic. We are assuming a belief in God. And, assuming this belief, we are asking how our life is to be made a godly one. *I* answer by making it a Christian life. Do you know of any other? I confess I have never heard of any serious proposal to substitute another religion

* Tit. ii. 10.

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for the Christian. Mr. Theodore Parker tells us there is "an absolute religion," a religion which combines all the truth and excellence of all the other religions; but I find that whatever good there is in his religion is borrowed from the Gospel, whilst it has serious blanks and deficiencies which the Gospel alone can fill up. Mr. Francis Newman says that the truth of religion is intuitive, that we do not need any book, however admirable and excellent, to teach us the knowledge and the worship of God. But I do not find that these self-evident principles, which he proclaims, have been discovered by any one who did not possess the Bible. On the contrary, however, all that he proclaims as of the essence of religion is found in the Christian Scriptures. But here again his system is full of serious omissions; it has no answers for many urgent questions which men will persist in asking, which they cannot help asking; and to which they will find no satisfactory answers anywhere but in the Gospel.

And what does the Gospel demand of us which is not perfectly reasonable, which is not sanctioned by our knowledge of ourselves, and our experience of our needs? Does the Gospel bid us come to God as *sinners?* And are we not sinners? Is there any human being who is thoroughly satisfied with his own life, who believes that he is in a position to meet all his responsibilities to God and to man? Is there

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any man who would wish to live his life over again exactly as he has lived it?

> "Vain was the man, and false as vain,
> Who said, were he ordained to run
> The long career of life again,
> He would do all that he had done."

Or, again, Does the Gospel tell us that we are *dependent creatures*, and that we cannot live rightly except as we habitually acknowledge our entire dependence upon God? And are we not dependent, in every sense of the word? Dependent upon one another for our very existence? dependent, above all, upon Almighty God, if there be a God?

There is one text in the Epistle to the Hebrews which seems to me to put the whole case before us, as it regards our life on earth, and the relation of that life to God: "That we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need." Let us meditate for a moment on these words, every one of us for himself, and let each one ask himself whether he is exempted from the double necessity which is implied in the statement which they contain. "That we may obtain mercy." Place yourself in the presence of your Father in heaven, and what is your first need, what must be your first entreaty? Is it not mercy? Suppose you are children, the young and dependent children, of an earthly father, and you have treated this father in the way that your

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conscience tells you you have treated the Most High? Could you come into the presence of that earthly father without saying, "Father, I have offended thee; I have failed of my duty towards thee; I deserve to be disowned and rejected by thee: thou hast done me good always, and I have been unthankful and disobedient?" Is it not what you who are fathers would expect of your own children in similar circumstances? Well, then, place yourselves before Almighty God your heavenly Father, and what is your first need? It is mercy, it is pardon, it is acceptance. Does not your conscience say this clearly, distinctly, unwaveringly? And this is what the Gospel says; but mind, this is what the Gospel offers. It tells us that God "will have mercy and not sacrifice." It tells us that Jesus Christ is the way to the Father; that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin; that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him; and that him that cometh unto Jesus, He will in no wise cast out. I assert, and I am sure that the conscience of mankind will affirm the assertion, that we cannot advance another step in religion until we are satisfied on this point; until we know that the Father's voice is ready to pronounce the words: "Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee."

This was the first thought; but there was a

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second: "And find grace to help in every time of need." It is a thought which arises within us as clearly as the other. We are not sinners only; we are weak, helpless, dependent creatures. Even when we would do good, evil is present with us. And those who have striven most earnestly to know the good and to do it, have become most deeply conscious of their need of grace to help in their weakness and in presence of the temptations by which they are constantly assailed. If a man were to tell you he had no such need, that he could always perfectly fulfil any purpose of good which he had formed, you would hardly believe him, or, if you believed him, you would form a very low opinion of the ideal of life which he had proposed to himself. Now the Gospel distinctly responds to this need which we experience. It bids us come to God through Jesus Christ, it bids us ask and we shall receive, it bids us seek and we shall find. To the heavy laden traveller on the way of life, the Son of God gives the cheering assurance, "My grace is sufficient for thee." Nay, He tells us of the presence of a powerful Helper by whom His strength will be made perfect in our weakness, One who is in us and is greater than he that is in the world. And He tells us distinctly that this power may be had for the asking; Your heavenly Father will "give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

I will suppose, for one moment, that I am speaking

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to those who are not Christians, either to those who have not had the knowledge of Jesus Christ, or to those who have hesitated to avail themselves of the promise which He has made for our special wants. I will ask them whether they do or do not stand in need of these two things, mercy and grace to help them; and then I will ask if they know where and how they are to be had; and I will venture to tell them that it is only in the Gospel of Jesus Christ that these supplies are provided in full abundance, and that whoever wishes to be a religious man or woman, whoever wishes to live a godly life, *must begin here*. Must begin here; yes, but *must not end here*. These are necessary starting points, but they are only starting points. They make a godly life possible, but that life must be lived from hour to hour, from day to day, from year to year, until the long pilgrimage of life shall be ended, until the warfare shall terminate in final victory. And the principle of such a life is that which we have already stated, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

Let us now *try to understand how those* who have obtained mercy of God in the pardon of their sin, and are looking to Him for grace to help in every time of need, *may give effect to this principle in their daily life*.

Now, with regard to the general rule in which this principle may be expressed, there is hardly room for a difference of opinion. The rule for the child of God

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must be this: in all things, as far as he knows it, as far as he has the means and opportunity of carrying it out, *he must do the will of God*, and have continual regard to His approval. It is a requirement which is as plainly set forth in every enlightened conscience as it is clearly stated in the Word of God. "And this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven." On this point I need not further dwell. It is universally recognized by all to whom I now address myself. It needs neither proof nor explanation.

But the point on which we have at present more particularly to insist does need to be enforced, to be set clearly forward, and to be kept earnestly in mind by all who desire to glorify God. This regard to the will of God, this desire to please Him *must extend to our whole life*, to every department and employment of our life, to every thought and word and deed which is within our own power.

It matters not what a man's position or occupation in life may be, high or low, dignified or mean according to human estimate, wherever we may be, however we may be engaged, our first and supreme concern must be to do the will of God, and to obtain His approval. And if we carry this thought into our work, it can never be poor, mean, undignified.

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George Herbert says:

> "Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws
> Makes that and the action fine." *

Yes; a man who is doing the meanest work, if he is doing his duty, may be performing a truly dignified action, while the man who is ruling a people may be doing one which is truly undignified and base. The mightiest ruler on earth may be living in forgetfulness of God and of righteousness; and the poorest and humblest of his subjects, who accepts his appointed daily task as that which is assigned to him by the Lord of the world and of men, and does it in His fear and with an eye to His approval, is a greater than he; for he is doing all to the glory of God.

The same principle should enter into our friendships. We have no right to choose our friends at the bidding of caprice or of self-interest: there are higher laws which should regulate the intercourse of man with man. In making this statement, I need hardly say that I do not propose to regulate relations so ethereal by any precise rules, which can be regarded as universal. In choosing our friends we are necessarily determined by considerations which can hardly be described, not only by similarity of disposition, by community of tastes, by identity of aims, and the

* Luther had said very much the same thing. See Dr. Uhlhorn's *Lecture on Work.*

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like; but by that subtle sympathy which is realized in the experience of the heart, when it cannot be reduced to the forms of the understanding. Such considerations are recognized in all human systems of thought and life, and they are sanctioned by the teaching of Holy Scripture and the examples of its saints.

But the principle which we are now considering claims for itself a supreme place in this sphere also. Here, too, the will of God and the glory of God must be present to our minds. We cannot be true friends to those who love us, we cannot truly enjoy their friendship and affection, if God is excluded from our intercourse with them. Go back to that home at Bethany, in which Jesus is seen not only as the Divine Saviour, but as the human friend, and you will see that men may, in friendship too, do all to the glory of God. He Who was Son of God as well as Son of Man, had for those friends a peculiar and personal affection, as He had for S. John among the apostles. But that friendship was so pure, so lofty, so blessed because God was in it; and in no other way can friendship be blessed to ourselves. And this remark extends *to all the commonest actions and recreations of life*. We could not put this thought more plainly and more strongly than S. Paul does: "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

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"Whatsoever ye do": nothing that we engage in is to be excluded from the operation of this law. As examples, he mentions the most common and the most necessary actions of our life: "Whether ye eat or drink."

Yes; our ordinary meals may, in this way, become sacramental: means of grace to ourselves and others. Look at that beautiful picture of the early Church which is set before us in the *Acts of the Apostles* (ii. 46, 47): "They did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people." What a transfiguration of our ordinary life would the same spirit in ourselves accomplish! What a contrast to the banquets of sin, to the feasts of the world! Not in gluttony, not in ostentation, not in heedlessness and thanklessness; but in simplicity, and gratitude, and brotherly love; such are the festivals in which Christ takes part, in which His servants do all to the glory of God.

And the same principle should descend to our lighter moments, to our recreations, for these are as lawful, and even as necessary, as our more serious employments. The kindly jest, the humorous story, the chastened pleasantry—can these be condemned by Him Who has given to us the keen perception to discern them, the power to enjoy them; by Him Who has made laughter the most contagious sound that is

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heard on earth? Believe it not. A man who is destitute of the sense of humour may be a most respectable member of society, but he has no business to despise those who are in this respect more richly endowed than himself. Perpetual jesting, immoderate laughter—these are signs of a frivolous mind, of an unchastened character; but here, again, the principle which we are asserting comes in for our guidance. Even in the sallies of the most brilliant wit, men may do all to the glory of God; they may eschew bitterness and levity and obscenity, which are the destruction of all true and reasonable hilarity; they may have a constant and never-ceasing regard to truth and charity and kindly helpfulness; and in so thinking and speaking and acting, they may be promoting the glory of God.

Yes, reader, and if these be our guides, then we need not fear the seeming sternness of those words of Christ, that for every idle word we must give account at the day of judgement.

I am fully persuaded that the mere consideration of this principle, in its application to our daily work and life, will bring home to most of us a conviction of its great importance. But it would be easy to enforce it by arguments which are well worthy of our serious attention.

I might show you, and you yourselves will easily perceive, what a change the introduction of such a

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principle would make in the whole spirit and tone of a man's life.

Think for one moment of a human life in which God has no place. Even if the man be just and honourable, kind and thoughtful towards his fellow-men, full of all beautiful and noble human qualities; and you suddenly discover that he is without God in the world, you shiver as though you had suddenly been transported to the region of snow and ice. You tremble as though you all at once discovered that the ground on which you were treading, all firm and solid as it seemed, was undermined and ready to fall through into unknown depths. Let God have His rightful place restored to Him in that life, and how strange and glorious is the transformation! But, above all, let the thought of the will of God and the glory of God go through a man's whole life, and what unity, what elevation, what sweetness and power are imparted by such an influence!

Unity! There can be no real unity in life which has not the love of God at its centre. What other principle is there which can harmonize a man's thoughts, and reduce his warring passions to peace? Can this unity be looked for in those who are swayed from hour to hour by every transient momentary impulse? You know it cannot. Upon such lives is written in clearest characters the terrible motto: "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

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Can it be found in those who are animated by the thought of self-interest? Alas! this is hardly more steady in its operations, whatever it may be in its aims, than the other. For it is liable to everlasting and violent distraction. What boundless knowledge, what unwearied watchfulness would be needed to impart to such a principle the element of constancy—of unity!

But he who takes for his one guide in life the will of God and the glory of God, although he may err in his judgements, yea, and fail in his endeavours, yet stands upon an unshaken and immoveable rock. "This one thing I do," he can say amid all the changes and chances of this mortal life; and whatever may fail him, he knows that one thing cannot fail—the approval of that gracious Father Whom he is ever seeking to serve and glorify.

What is there on earth that can bring us satisfaction or hope? Our brightest anticipations are ever and anon clouded by disappointment; our strongest refuges are swept away by the storms of time; our most certain possessions crumble to dust in our hands. There is only one thing that remains. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter, said he who found that every earthly good was vanity, and vanity of vanities: "Fear God and keep His commandments." Yes, "the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the Word of our God endureth for ever." Let that Word, then, be your guide and support. Let that God be

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the object of your life and He will be your shield and your exceeding great reward. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven," and then, for you, life will not be vanity, and death will be gain.

*** It is hardly necessary to refer the reader to Principal Caird's famous sermon on this subject.

THE END.

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